

*Town of Acton*  
*“State of the Town”*  
*Meeting*



*Monday, October 24, 2005*

**The “State of the Town” Meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. in the  
R. J. Grey Regional Junior High School Auditorium  
16 Charter Road**

**“State of the Town” Meeting**  
**Monday, October 24, 2005**  
**7:00 P.M.**

**R. J. Grey Regional Junior High School Auditorium**

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**Internet Resources**

We hope as many people can attend the meeting to communicate in-person, however, if you cannot attend and wish to comment, electronic mail contacts are available.

All of the committees contributing to this Report are available via e-mail in addition to traditional communication methods. By using the following addresses, the Town automatically forwards your message to all members of the committee.

<b><u>To contact the...</u></b>	<b><u>Send e-mail to...</u></b>
Board of Selectmen	bos@acton-ma.gov
School Committee (Acton-Boxborough)	ab_school_committee@mail.ab.mec.edu
School Committee (Acton Public)	aps_school_committee@mail.ab.mec.edu
Board of Health	boh@acton-ma.gov
Economic Development and Industrial Corporation	edic@acton-ma.gov
Economic Development Committee	edc@acton-ma.gov
Finance Committee	fincom@acton-ma.gov
Planning Board	pb@acton-ma.gov

## **Introduction to the State of the Town Meeting/Gathering/Discussion**

The Acton Board of Selectmen has decided to continue what was a successful meeting last year and called for a State of the Town Meeting. We will plan to adjourn the meeting at about 10:00 p.m.

It is our intent to provide a forum in which the Town's citizens may provide their thoughts and opinions on the selected topics to the elected and appointed leadership of the Town. Such an exercise should provide the town leaders with an enhanced sense of the community as we grapple with important matters concerning the future of the Town of Acton.

This State of the Town Discussion will not be a Town Meeting in the conventional or statutory sense. Attendance and participation will not be limited registered voters, there will be no check-in, no Warrant Articles, no visual presentations, motions will not be accepted, and no votes will be taken. On the other hand, it is expected that the same decorum expected at a Town Meeting will be maintained in this gathering.

Information thought necessary by various Boards and Committees as background for an informed discussion of the chosen topics has been provided in this booklet. There may be further written materials prepared by the officials/staffs of the Town or Schools which did not meet the booklet deadline also available at the door. In addition any attendee at this State of the Town Discussion is free to prepare his/her own signed handouts for the attendees and place any such material on the table near the door.

Initial leadership oral presentations to introduce each topic will be made by a single individual and very severely limited by the presiding officer so as to maximize the time for citizen and resident input and feedback. Similarly attendees, and members of Boards/Committees offering later comments, will be requested to be as succinct as possible in their offerings so that as many people who desire to speak may be heard. The discussions will be confined, as far as possible, to the chosen topics listed below in the interests of being able to hear comments on each topic in some depth. Questions posed from the floor may be gathered for subsequent rather than immediate response. So that oral feedback and comments may be obtained on all the chosen topics, arbitrary limits may be imposed by the presiding officer as to the length of the discussion of each topic, if the necessary.

Giving due consideration to the available time, and anticipating a good turn out, the following topics have been chosen for this initial State of the Town Meeting. The topics will be taken up in this order:

1. Role of Volunteers in Running Town Government
2. State of the Town – Financial Update
3. What Should be the Role of Commercial Development in Acton?

In addition, we have provided some information related to Acton's future wastewater needs as general information in this booklet. We do not anticipate discussing this issue at the State of the Town meeting.

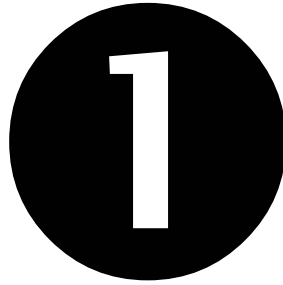
To emphasize the difference from a special or annual Town Meeting, at this gathering the physical set up of the auditorium will not include any stage seating or designated seating for Boards and Committees, and overhead and computer projector equipment will not be available for use. The setup of the floor microphones, however, will be in the same pattern as that used for Town Meetings. The Chairman of the Board of Selectmen will preside over the meeting, from the front center below the stage. The Vice Chair will speak, if such is necessary, for the Board of Selectmen. It has been requested that the designated "point person" for each topic be ready, when appropriate, to designate who from Boards, Committees,

and/or staff should answer particular questions when allowed by the presiding officer, again so as to maximize time for citizen input.

We hope to see you at this State of the Town Meeting at 7:00 p.m. on October 24, 2005.

After the meeting The Board of Selectmen (e-mail: [bos@acton-ma.gov](mailto:bos@acton-ma.gov)) will welcome your comments as to whether we achieved the stated goal of this meeting to your satisfaction or not.

Peter K. Ashton  
Chairman,  
Acton Board of Selectmen



# *Role of Volunteers in Running Town Government*

## Overview of Acton's Boards, Committees, and Commissions

Except as otherwise noted in the text, all the members of the bodies set forth below are appointed by the Board of Selectmen pursuant to the Town Charter.

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Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council	abcc@acton-ma.gov
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The AB Cultural Council works to bring cultural events to the two communities. Its complement is seven members, but is currently one short.

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Acton Community Housing Corporation	achc@acton-ma.gov
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The ACHC is charged with facilitating affordable housing for low and moderate income households. The role of the ACHC is to act as the Town's initial contact with developers of proposed affordable residential housing projects, which may be site-specific or exploratory. The developer presents a proposed housing plan, indicating unit design and size, related facilities, site planning and affordability. ACHC generally holds one or more public information sessions on each proposal. The ACHC takes a position on each development and transmits the information to the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Appeals. ACHC meets the 1st and 3rd Thursdays, alternating between 7AM and 7PM. Membership: 5 regular members, 3 associate members, 3 year terms. Many of the members of ACHC are involved in the field of affordable housing development.

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Board of Appeals	boa@acton-ma.gov
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The Board of Appeals is a quasi-judicial body that interprets and applies the Acton Zoning Bylaws. It generally hears and determines citizen petitions in 3 areas: (a) variances, by which a citizen may seek a waiver or exception to a specific zoning bylaw as it applies to construction upon or use of a particular property, (b) special permits, by which a citizen may seek approval to construct or use a particular property specifically authorized by the zoning bylaws, and (c) appeals to overturn decisions of the Building Commissioner in the interpretation or application of the zoning bylaws as such decision affects the construction upon or use of a particular property. In addition, the Board of Appeals, sits as the permitting authority on comprehensive permits submitted under MGL Chapter 40B (so called "affordable housing" permits). As the permitting authority on 40B applications the Board of Appeals essentially sits in the shoes of all boards and departments of the Town of Acton for which a license or permit would otherwise be required for a project, including the Board of Selectman, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Engineering Department, Board of Health, Police Department, Fire Department, Traffic Advisory Board and Historical Commission. The Board has three members and another three alternate members who may sit if one of the regular members is not available.

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Board of Assessors	bas@acton-ma.gov
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The primary function of the Board of Assessors is to annually value all real & personal property at its full market value. Assessors are thereafter responsible for defending the valuations they have established. The Assessors also determine the amount of new growth (construction) taxes that can be added to the tax levy. They are responsible for the preparation of the information necessary for tax rate setting process, including the input to the Tax Classification Hearing held annually with the Board of Selectman. The Assessors also oversee the groundwork of the tax rate recap, which includes all town appropriations, state and county assessments, any other expenditures and all state and local receipts to offset those costs.

The Assessors provide multiple commitments or valuation lists to the Tax Collector, who's responsible for issuing the tax bills to the property owners and citizens and the collection of those bills. The Assessors are also responsible for acting on all abatement & exemption applications. An abatement is a reduction to the assessed value of real or personal property, where an exemption is generally a reduction in the amount of the tax bill. They annually determine an amount of monies to be set aside for all abatements and exemptions. Furthermore the Assessors commit and report all betterments and are responsible for all apportionments of the betterments.

The Assessors are responsible for all motor vehicle excise bills. The assessors update the billing file on a regular basis and then commit the excise to the Tax Collector, who in turn issues the bill. The assessors also review and grant any abatements regarding excise, and answer any questions regarding the bill.

The Assessors meet every first Wednesday of every month at 6:00 p.m. in room 46. The Board consists of three regular members and two alternate members. The alternate members are authorized to act as an assessor in the absence of one or more of the regular assessors. Members of the Board of Assessors are required to complete a short training course given by the state upon or shortly after taking office.

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Board of Health	<a href="mailto:boh@acton-ma.gov">boh@acton-ma.gov</a>
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The Board of Health is empowered by the General Laws to perform many important and crucial duties relative to the protection of public health. Among these duties are developing policies that support public health goals, conduct hearings and pass regulations that protect and preserve the public health, conduct hearings to consider the granting of variances from health regulations or enforcing those regulations, develop policy and provide guidance for public health programs administered by the Nursing Service, provide guidance for the Health Department in implementing the Wastewater, Food Service, and the Hazardous Materials & Waste Programs and License Massage Therapist.

The Board generally meets the second and fourth Mondays of each month (subject to change due to Monday holidays). The meetings are generally held in Room 126 of the Town Hall and start at 7:30 P.M. and generally running 2 hours. There are five full members of the Board, two voting Associates and two non-voting Associates. It is helpful if potential members have some background in medicine, public health or have experience in wastewater, nursing or hazardous waste issues.

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Cable Advisory Committee	<a href="mailto:cac@acton-ma.gov">cac@acton-ma.gov</a>
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The Cable Advisory Committee serves to advise the Board of Selectmen in matters pertaining to Cable Television in the Town of Acton. The committee also accepts complaints from consumers and works with the cable company to resolve consumer issues. There are currently nine members; the committee meets the second Thursday of each month at Town Hall.

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Cemetery Commission	<a href="mailto:cemetery@acton-ma.gov">cemetery@acton-ma.gov</a>
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The three Cemetery Commissioners meet the second Wednesday of the month at 2:00 PM at the Cemetery Maintenance Building in Woodlawn Cemetery to oversee the operation of the Town's three cemeteries and associated perpetual care funds, including operation of the chapel at Woodlawn. The Cemetery Commission is part of the Natural Resources Department.

The Citizens' Library Board of Trustees is a group of citizen volunteers entrusted with the governing of the library. Their responsibilities are ethical, legal, and fiduciary. Library Trustees are library advocates; they are active, informed, and interested library supporters and are the vital link between the library and the community. Trustees also need an understanding of municipal finance, local budgetary pressures, personnel issues, and the administrative practices of the municipality. There are three Trustees at the Citizens' Library; they are elected to three-year terms which are staggered in order to provide continuity of service. Meetings of the Trustees are held at 5:00 pm on the second Tuesday of each month at the Library in West Acton and are open to the public.

The Commission on Disability's mission is to make Acton a better place to live by: advocating for the rights and interests of citizens with disabilities and their families; ensuring that Acton meets the laws, regulations, and guidelines set down by federal, state and regional bodies pertaining to the rights of citizens with disabilities; and acting as a resource for education around the needs of people with disabilities and their families. This includes, among other functions: coordinating activities of other local groups organized for similar purposes; preparing books and pamphlets necessary for the work; conducting surveys of existing facilities and variance applications in regard to the Americans with Disabilities Act; reporting handicapped parking violations; and reviewing citizen's access complaints.

Membership is up to 9 members and a majority of the members should consist of persons with a disability. A member may be of the immediate family of a person with a disability, and one member will be either an elected or appointed official of the Town. Any individual with an interest in the needs and concerns of persons with a disability is also encouraged to join the commission. A member can serve two terms of 3 years each. The Town Manager appoints members subject to the approval of the Board of Selectmen. Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month, September through June, 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM at the Town Hall.

The COD needs 4 new members, and would also appreciate any time or effort from students to senior citizens who may want to contribute to various projects, for example, updating the COD website or taking photographs.

The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) is responsible for the administration of the Community Preservation Fund, the selection and recommendation to Town Meeting of projects for funding, and the monitoring of the progress of funded community preservation projects. By statute, Community Preservation Act funds may be allocated to those projects which support the preservation and/or enhancement of open space, historic resources, community housing, and land for recreational use. The CPC membership is comprised of representatives from the following Town bodies: Board of Selectmen, Historical Commission, Planning Board, Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission, and Acton Housing Authority. There are also three At-large positions and one Associate position. Any citizens interested in furthering the goals of Community Preservation in Acton should apply for membership on the CPC.



As part of the CPA statute, the Committee must also conduct an annual needs assessment of the community's plans and priorities with respect to the four target areas of the Act. It also publishes a comprehensive Plan – updated annually - with guidelines and information for applicants seeking community preservation funds. Since 2004, the CPC has recommended approximately \$2.2 million in allocations, which have been supported at the Annual Town Meetings. The Community Preservation Committee generally meets every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month in the Acton Memorial Library or at Town Hall. All CPC meetings are open and the Committee welcomes public participation throughout the process. Citizens may email the Committee at [cpc@acton-ma.gov](mailto:cpc@acton-ma.gov) or contact the Town Planning office at (978) 264-9636 with questions, comments, and feedback. For additional information, citizens may visit the Community Preservation page on the Town website at [www.acton-ma.gov](http://www.acton-ma.gov).

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**Conservation Commission**

[concom@acton-ma.gov](mailto:concom@acton-ma.gov)

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The primary responsibility of the Conservation Commission is the administration of both the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (the Act) and the Town of Acton Wetland Protection Bylaw (the Bylaw). As such, the Commission acts as both a state and local regulatory body.

Under both the Act and the Bylaw, wetlands and waterways are presumed significant to the protection of public and private water supplies, the protection of groundwater supplies, the control of flooding, protection from stormwater damage, the prevention of pollution, and the protection of fisheries and wildlife habitat. The Conservation Commission's primary responsibility is to review work or other development activities within or proximate to the town's wetlands and waterways in order to insure that the presumed values of these resource areas are preserved and maintained during the conduct of such work. This is accomplished primarily through the technical and regulatory review of project plans submitted to the Commission by applicants in the form of a "Notice of Intent" to conduct work within or proximate to a protected resource area.

The Conservation Commission's other responsibilities include the management of Town conservation lands, including the Acton Arboretum, and the preparation and periodic up-dating of a conservation and passive outdoor recreation plan consistent with the Town Master Plan. The Commission is aided in these activities by the Land Stewardship and Open Space subcommittees. As appropriate, the Commission also works with other Town boards and neighboring town boards to coordinate conservation and resource protection efforts that are of a broader or regional nature.

The Conservation Commission meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month. The work of the Commission requires a cross-section of expertise from people who share a commitment to conservation and environmental protection, including botanists, biologists, geologists, engineers, naturalists and environmental lawyers/environmental regulatory specialists. The Commission is made up of seven members and three associate members who are appointed by the Board of Selectmen.

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**Council on Aging**

[coa@acton-ma.gov](mailto:coa@acton-ma.gov)

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The mission of the Council on Aging (COA) is to ascertain the health, economic, social and cultural needs of the elderly, advocate for necessary services, and regularly advise the Town of the state of seniors' well-being. The Council seeks to maximize independence and quality of life. The Board supports staff and volunteer projects and events, involves local, state and national elected officials and organizations to further legislation affecting seniors, and collaborates with the Friends of the COA in joint projects of benefit to the organization. The nine regular members and associate members attend monthly meetings (second Wednesday at the Senior Center at 4:30 p.m.), set goals and priorities, and participate in special events held at the Senior Center. The COA currently has a full complement of regular members.

Applicants for associate membership are welcome. Candidates' backgrounds are usually in law, government, public relations, finance, technology and social services. Experience in working with, and advocating for, senior citizens is important.

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Economic Development Committee

edc@acton-ma.gov

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In 1998, the Board of Selectmen established the Economic Development Committee (EDC) to advise the Selectmen on matters pertaining to Acton improving its economic well being. The EDC's mission is: "To enhance the value and desirability of Acton in concert with the Master Plan by 1) supporting current commercial and industrial businesses, 2) encouraging the absorption of underutilized property, and 3) attracting new businesses that meet the long term needs of the Town." The EDC's objectives include:

- Promote current and new commercial development within the context of the Master Plan.
- Increase the commercial tax base to reduce the tax burden on residential taxpayers.
- Support commercial and industrial growth that will fit in Acton and contribute to the community's quality of life and Fiscal Stability.
- Support the concept of village and business districts by encouraging businesses of appropriate scale that will contribute to a mix of activities.

Each year the EDC undertakes various projects to further these objectives in a variety of ways. The EDC consists of up to eleven Acton residents or business owners appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Two representatives from the Planning Board, one from the Finance Committee, two from the Chamber of Commerce, and four at large members join two sitting Selectmen to make up the EDC. The committee meets at Town Hall in public session generally on the third Thursday of the month.

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Economic Development and Industrial Corporation    edic@acton-ma.gov

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The 1998 Master Plan Update recommended the creation of an Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC), designed to spur commercial development consistent with the goals of the Master Plan Update. This required obtaining permission of Town Meeting to file legislation with the State for a Home Rule Petition to create the EDIC. This permission was granted in April 2000, and in November 2001, the Massachusetts Legislature passed this bill. The bill was accepted by another Town Meeting in April 2003. The goal of the EDIC is to ameliorate the rise in residential property taxes by spurring commercial development in town, consistent with the other goals of the Master Plan, such as preservation of open space and strengthening Acton's Villages and commercial centers. During 2004, the Selectmen interviewed and appointed a seven person Board of Directors to lead the EDIC. The Board has spent much of its time investigating how other Massachusetts EDICs got off the ground and the types of work they do, as well as researching sources of funding and relationships with various state agencies. The next major step for the EDIC is submission of an Economic Development Plan for the town, which must be approved by Town Meeting. This is a public process and the input of the Townspeople is welcome. The Board currently has one open position and persons with applicable experience, especially with commercial real estate development, are encouraged to apply via the VCC.

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Historical Commission

hc@acton-ma.gov

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The objective of the Historical Commission is to protect and preserve the Town's historic character and assets, be they buildings, open spaces, landscapes, or historic districts. The Commission maintains the Cultural Resource List of significant structures in town, and reviews any demolition of these structures via the public hearing process. The Commission can be a design resource to property owners who are

remodeling older properties. The Commission also reviews and comments on proposed subdivisions with regards to (loss of) stone walls, cart paths, old quarries, or other historic elements of the landscape. During the review process, the group frequently walks the land to identify and document culturally significant resources. The Commission works in conjunction with the Historic District Commission, with jurisdiction being everything outside of the 3 Historic Districts in town.

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Historic District Commission

hdc@acton-ma.gov

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The Historic District Commission (HDC) is responsible for helping to preserve the heritage of Acton by protecting the historic architecture and integrity of the Town's three historic district areas: Acton Center, South Acton and West Acton. Together, these historic district areas encompass over 180 properties and include structures up to over 300 years old. The HDC administers and enforces the Town's Local Historic District Bylaw (LHDB) (Ch.P, Bylaws), which was enacted about 15 years ago under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40c. The HDC regularly meets on the first and third Mondays of each month in Town Hall. The meetings are open to the public and frequently involve consideration of multiple applications for exterior changes to buildings and properties within the three historic district areas, input from members of the public, and consideration of violations of the LHDB. The HDC issues certificates that are a prerequisite for obtaining a permit where required, and the HDC issues various other types of correspondence and notices on a regular basis. The HDC is supposed to consist of 7 regular and as many as 4 alternate members; however, at present there are 6 regular and no alternate members. Due to recent resignations, the HDC is seeking new members, especially from persons residing in West Acton.

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Land Stewardship Committee

lsc@acton-ma.gov

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The Land Stewardship Committee was created at the suggestion of the Conservation Commission as a subsidiary body to maintain the town's conservation lands: woods, meadows and wetlands reserved for wildlife and low-impact recreation. The work of the committee includes designing, building and maintaining trails, kiosks and boardwalks; creating maps for each parcel and a complete book of maps; removing selected invasive plants; locating and reporting illegal uses of the lands; and creating educational activities that will enhance the public's appreciation and care for the 1,600+ acres of Acton's conservation lands. Land stewards, assigned to each parcel, usually met on the first Wednesday of every month at 4:00 PM. In addition, the committee is always happy to have volunteers for special tasks. Please see the website at <http://www.acton-ma.gov/lsc> to get more information and/or to volunteer.

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Memorial Library Trustees

mlt@acton-ma.gov

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The primary responsibility of the Board of Trustees for the Acton Memorial Library is to provide strategic direction to the Library. Our primary functions include budgeting, long term planning, establishing policies, and guiding the Director in her execution of these matters. The Board normally meets on the third Monday of each month from 7:30-9:30 p.m. in the conference room located on the second floor of the Library. The Board occasionally meets as a body more than once monthly if pending business so requires. Some business is handled by one or more working groups, such as the literary committee, or the Civil War display committee.

There are nine trustees, six of whom are corporate trustees (who are not subject to periodic election) and three of whom are elected at the annual Town election for three year terms. Each trustee has a vote on all matters before the Board; the Director is present at meetings, but does not vote. While there are no particular skills required to be an effective trustee, some of the more important qualifications include a commitment to attending and actively participating in the regular monthly meetings, and a willingness to assume a reasonable share of duties in connection with both certain events (such as Oktoberfest) and

administrative duties (serving as an officer or leading a working group). A love of libraries, particularly the Acton Memorial Library, is a plus.

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Morrison Farm Committee

mc@acton-ma.gov

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The Morrison Committee is comprised of various representatives from the Conservation Commission, the Land Stewardship Committee, the Recreation Commission, the East Acton Village Committee, the Cemetery Commission, at-large, neighborhood individuals and others. To date, the committee has met several times and has solicited ideas for the potential use of Morrison and its integration with the bordering properties consistent with the town meeting vote that enabled the land to be purchased. The committee will continue to meet to achieve its goal of making a recommendation to the Board of Selectman for the use and design on the property. The committee welcomes all input and some ideas that have been suggested include, but are not limited to the following for certain portions of the land: a working organic farm similar to Drumlin Farm, playing field or fields, a community berry patch, disc golf course, preservation of open space and meadows to name just a few. The committee will shortly begin its deliberations based on the input provided over the last several months. A public forum will be held in the near future.

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Open Space Committee

osc@acton-ma.gov

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The 2002 – 2007 Town of Acton *Open Space and Recreation Plan* (OSRP) identified three primary Goals and Objectives for preserving the vision of the community as expressed through the OSRP. These included:

- Preserving the remaining elements of Acton’s rural character;
- Protecting the environment to insure clean water and unpolluted lands; and
- Improving the passive and active recreational opportunities for all of the Town’s citizens, both young and old.

In order to better insure that the above goals be accomplished, the OSRP recommended that the OSRP Committee remain active beyond the completion of the Plan, and that it be charged “with the ongoing responsibility to evaluate open space preservation opportunities, act as an advocate to town boards, and keep the public informed about progress made on the OSRP.” Per the recommendation of the OSRP, and in recognition of the pressures being placed on Acton’s remaining open space, the Board of Selectman have this year established a permanent Open Space Committee as a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission. The primary responsibility of the Open Space Committee will be to advise the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission as to the goals and recommendations of the OSRP. Tasks of the Committee will include:

- Advising Town Boards on land acquisition/protection opportunities, including assessment of lands associated with Article 61 and 61A offerings, land set-asides associated with PCRCs, and land gifts or defaults to the Town;
- Identifying state and federal funding opportunities for open space protection;
- Acting as sponsor and/or advocate for open space protection funding proposals to be presented to the Town of Acton Community Preservation Committee through the Board of Selectman; and
- Making recommendations as to amendments to the *Open Space and Recreation Plan* as and when required.

The proposed Open Space Committee has up to seven members serving terms of three years, of which one member is from the Board of Selectman, one member is from the Conservation Commission and one

member is from the Planning Board. Meetings are generally held one Friday morning per month, although more frequently as needed.

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Outdoor Light Education Committee

[olec@acton-ma.gov](mailto:olec@acton-ma.gov)

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The Outdoor Light Education Committee encourages the diminution of light radiation into the sky and trespass on adjoining property. Previously, the committee researched, wrote and proposed a new Acton Bylaw regulating commercial outdoor lighting which was adopted at the 2004 Town Meeting). The current purpose of OLEC is to provide information to the residents of Acton to guide responsible choices in their residential outdoor lighting installations that are not covered in the Acton Bylaws. OLEC is designing a web site with recommendations for responsible residential lighting and conducts Star Parties. OLEC is also conducting a study of ways the Town might improve its streetlight lighting assets both for more directed, lower-glare fixtures, and also save electricity costs. Acton's streetlights are currently composed mostly of old and inefficient mercury vapor lamps. Newer lamp technology can provide the same light for half the energy and cost and NSTAR provides substantial incentives for towns to convert to this new technology. As a first stage of the study, OLEC is completing a detailed survey of all streetlights in Acton. The next stage will be to use the detailed survey to calculate costs for several possible options for streetlight upgrading, and to present these to the Town for possible action. There are five committee members. Regular meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month, at 7:30, in Town Hall.

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Planning Board

[pb@acton-ma.gov](mailto:pb@acton-ma.gov)

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The Planning Board is legally responsible for regulating the subdivision of land following the parameters of the Massachusetts Subdivision Control Law. It also has been charged by Town Meeting with review and approval on several types of special permits required by the Town's zoning bylaw. The Planning Board, as required by state law, periodically solicits comments from residents and businesses to ascertain community preferences, in the revision of our Master Plan; and conducts studies to identify Acton's resources and needs. Emphasis of study is placed on conditions affecting the safety and welfare of present and future inhabitants and business enterprises. It is then the Planning Board's responsibility to revise the Master Plan document, seek Town Meeting approval and assist in the implementation of the Master Plan. The Master Plan and related documents form the basis of the Planning Board's recommendations in applying the zoning bylaws to all development proposals. One method of implementing the Master Plan's Goals is through zoning bylaw amendments, which require public hearings and approval by two thirds of Town Meeting. The Planning Board is counseled and assisted in its day-to-day work by the professional team of the Acton Planning Department, headed by Roland Bartl, AICP. The Planning Board usually meets on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 7:30 PM in the Memorial Library. Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed. Subdivision and special permit public hearings have statutory quorum requirements and may be continued for several meetings if necessary. The Board members include 7 members with 5 year terms and 2 associate members who serve 1 year terms. Currently the Board is in need of another associate member.

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Recreation Commission

[rc@acton-ma.gov](mailto:rc@acton-ma.gov)

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The role of the Acton Recreation Commission is to provide vision and leadership in the development of recreational opportunities for the citizens of Acton. In it's advisory role to the Board of Selectmen, the Commission oversees long range planning for recreational facilities and site acquisition, as well as development and maintenance of existing recreational facilities. The Commission works closely with the Director of Recreation to review programs, policies and proposals for new opportunities. The Commission maintains close liaison with the Conservation Commission, the Planning Board and the school's Community Education Department. The Commission's primary activities include becoming

familiar with the current use and condition of existing recreation facilities, bringing any development or maintenance issue to town officials and keeping the Board of Selectmen informed of possibilities for active recreation at sites proposed for municipal acquisition.

The Recreation Commission generally meets on the first Tuesday of each month at Town Hall. The work of the Commission is enhanced by members with a wide range of interests in active and passive recreation. The Commission is made up of five full members and two associate members. The Commission currently has openings for two associate members and applicants are welcome. Citizens may e-mail the Commission at [rc@acton-ma.gov](mailto:rc@acton-ma.gov) or contact the Recreation Director's office at (978) 264-9608 with questions, comments, and feedback. For additional information, citizens may visit the Recreation Commission's page on the Town website at [www.acton-ma.gov](http://www.acton-ma.gov).

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South Acton Commuter Rail Task Force	<a href="mailto:sacrtf@acton-ma.gov">sacrtf@acton-ma.gov</a>
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The South Acton Commuter Rail Task Force (SACRTF) is a temporary committee formed by the Selectmen in mid-2005 with a mission of determining how the town should facilitate the use of the South Acton Commuter Rail Station and increase the use of the commuter rail system, protecting the unique character of the South Acton village and the surrounding neighborhoods. The Committee has nine members, which include regular commuters, South Acton residents, a representative for commuters from outside Acton and a member of the Planning Board. It currently plans to meet every other Wednesday evening at 7 pm in Town Hall.

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Transportation Advisory Committee	<a href="mailto:tac@acton-ma.gov">tac@acton-ma.gov</a>
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It seems like everyone moves into Acton over the summer and doesn't realize what traffic is really like here until September. If only there were better bicycle paths and facilities, less speeding, and more sidewalks in town! The Acton Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) addresses these issues along with local roadway problems, parking issues, and traffic calming, etc. - and works directly with town staff to do so. The TAC meets once a month, and reports in an advisory role to the Board of Selectmen. The TAC is expected to take a proactive as well as a reactive role in dealing with issues.

We are always looking for people interested in various aspects of traffic planning and transportation in Acton, including commuting, pedestrian and bicycling issues and walkway design. Some professional experience in any of these areas including site plan review is helpful; enthusiasm about improving something so vital to life here and a willingness to tackle difficult problems with creativity and sensibility is essential. We seek people interested in finding creative solutions, recognizing that transportation planning should serve the community – including cyclists, pedestrians, and all residents – and not just motorists. There are 5 full and 2 associate members. The TAC has two openings and expects a third vacancy by year-end.

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Volunteer Coordinating Committee	<a href="mailto:vcc@acton-ma.gov">vcc@acton-ma.gov</a>
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The Volunteer Coordinating Committee advertises open Board, Committee and Commission positions, interviews candidates and provides recommendations concerning appointments to the Board of Selectmen, as well as monitoring the membership status of the various agencies. The committee's full complement would be seven members, but it is currently short three.



*State of the Town –  
Financial Update*

## State of the Town

### Overview

Last year in preparation for the first State of the Town meeting, the town's leadership outlined the reasons why we asked the voters to approve an operating override to maintain services and help overcome the severe budget constraints we have been facing. We are grateful to the voters who responded affirmatively in passing a \$3.8 million operating override last spring, and this year we have promised that we would not ask for another operating override. Nevertheless, the budget situation has not improved since last fall. We continue to face a severe loss in state revenue, combined with relatively flat local revenues. On the expense side, utility costs have risen unexpectedly this year which will require cuts in other areas this year, and will require a 25% budgetary increase next year. Health insurance, retirement, and special education costs continue to rise at rates far above the rate at which we can raise property taxes under Proposition 2½.

This year at the State of the Town meeting, we will devote slightly less time to discussing our finances than last year, but that does not mean the issues are any less important. This year we hope to focus the discussion on the town's finances not only on our continued operating budgetary problems, but also on how we may fund our burgeoning capital needs that have gone largely unfunded over the last three years. Last year we asked the citizens to approve a \$4.5 million operating override that would have funded \$700,000 for capital needs, split evenly between the town and schools. The voters elected not to support this higher override amount, but we continue to face the difficulty of solving the issue of financing capital while maintaining services. We hope that the conversation at State of the Town this year will include the voters' views on what seems to be a key question: how do we try to fund capital needs if we want to maintain the level of services (operating budgets) that voters supported last year by passing the \$3.8 million operating override. The rest of this report provides more detail on the state of the town's finances, a preliminary look at FY07 budgetary increases, tradeoffs between capital budgets and operating budgets, and possible means of financing capital items.

### Revenue Projections

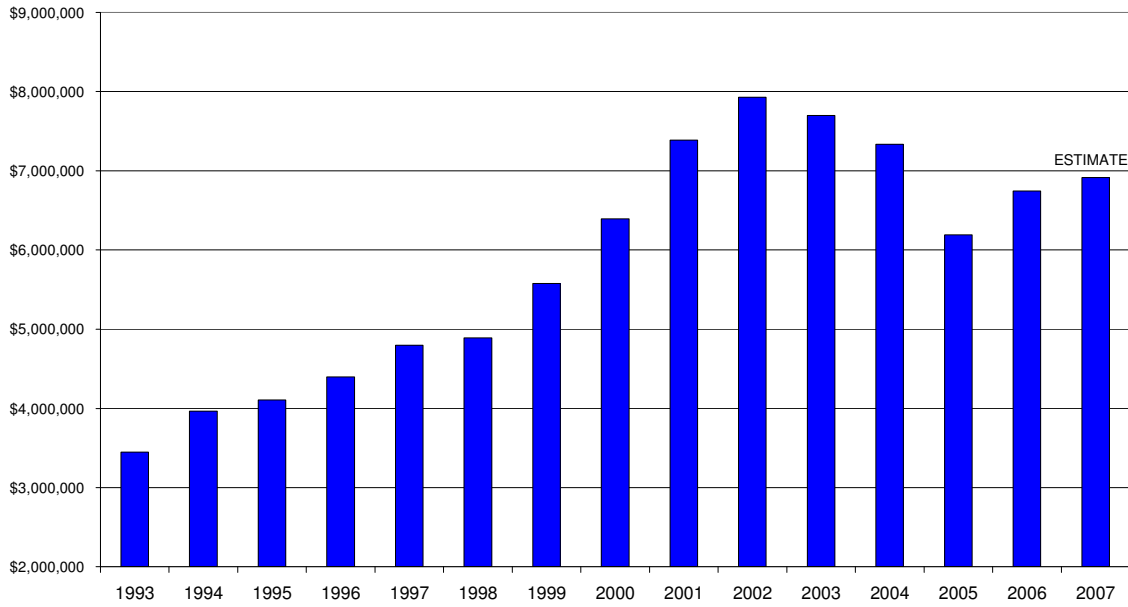
The Acton Leadership Group (ALG)<sup>1</sup> has been meeting to establish budgetary planning projections. Our focus thus far has been to establish projections for next year's revenues, including new growth, state aid and local revenue other than property taxes. Despite modest increases this year, we project that in FY07 we are likely to see only a 2.5 percent increase in state aid, over \$1 million less than the peak years of state aid experienced in 2002 and 2003 when we received almost \$8 million each year as shown in Figure 1. Since that time we have experienced a decline of 15 percent in state aid and we are still over \$1 million below the level of state aid we saw four years ago. Expressed differently, in real (inflation-adjusted) dollar terms the amount of state aid flowing to Acton projected for FY07 is not quite equivalent to the dollar value we received in FY99 as shown in Figure 2. Thus even though our needs have grown substantially in the last eight years, the amount of state aid we receive is about equivalent to what we received eight years ago in constant dollar terms.

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<sup>1</sup> ALG is a group that meets monthly to develop a comprehensive budget plan for the coming fiscal year as well as a longer term plan. It is composed of the chair and vice chair of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee, the chairs of the local and Regional School Committees, the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, and the Town Manager and the assistant Town Manager. ALG is not a decision-making group but rather makes recommendations to the individual Boards regarding budgetary matters.



**Figure 1**  
**Total Net State Aid to Acton\***



\* Projected value for FY07 per ALG preliminary estimate

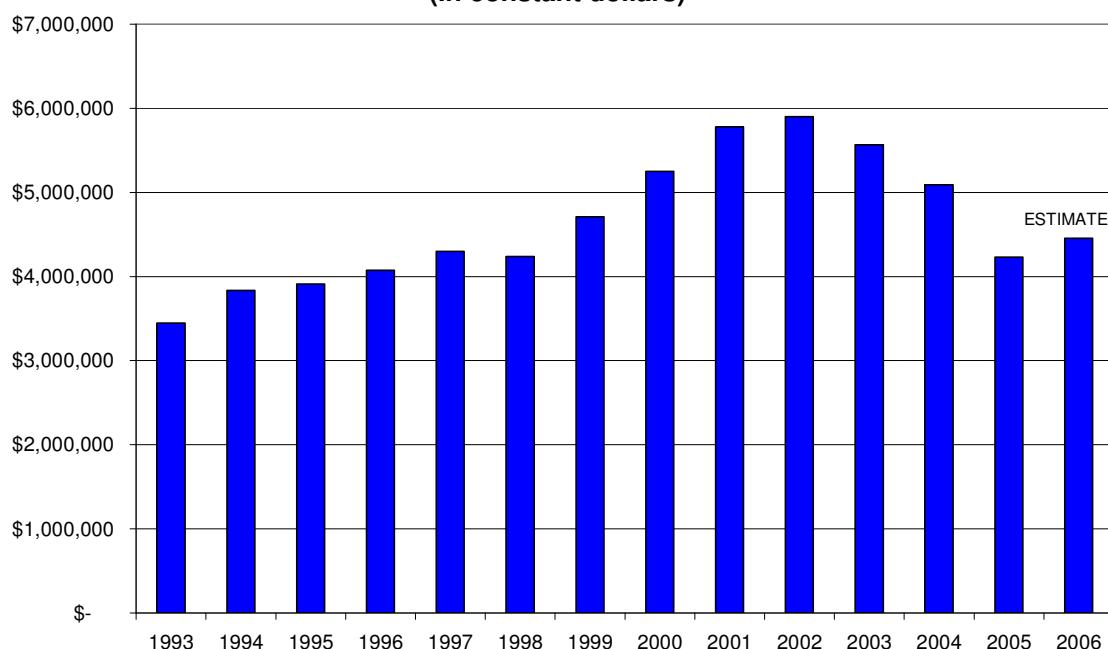
The reduction in state aid is particularly acute in Acton where we depend on state aid and the tax levy as our two primary sources of revenue. We rely on state aid for 10 percent of our revenue, and an overwhelming 80 percent comes from the tax levy. This is much higher than the state average and indeed higher than virtually all of the towns with whom we compare ourselves.

Other sources of revenue to the town have remained relatively flat. New growth tax revenue is expected to decline further in FY07, down \$450,000 from 2002, as a result of a decline in new construction in town. Excise tax revenue and fees have increased sufficient to offset the decline in new growth, and although we expect fee revenue to remain flat in FY07, we do expect to see continued growth in excise tax revenue. Our current projection indicates that we expect non-tax sources of revenue to the town to grow by 2.3 percent in FY07. This assumes no use of free cash, although we do anticipate that the town will have a balance of approximately \$500,000 in free cash<sup>1</sup> which could be available for appropriation.

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<sup>1</sup> Both the schools and the town were able to turn back modest sums at the end of FY05. We do not expect free cash balance to be certified by the state until December at the earliest.

**Figure 2**  
**Total Net State Aid to Acton\***  
(In constant dollars)



\* Projected value for FY07 per ALG preliminary estimate; values expressed in 1993 dollars

### **Budget Issues**

As the town's leadership attempts to build budgets for next year, we can anticipate that, without an operating override, these budgets will be constrained to grow at most by 3.5 to 4.5 percent. Both the town and schools are very early in the budget-building process, but we already see several ominous trends that are likely to cause significant belt-tightening for this year as well as the coming year.

### **Energy Costs**

As we are all too well aware, energy costs have skyrocketed in recent months, far beyond the levels we had budgeted for in the current year. It is likely by the end of the year the town as a whole (schools and municipal) will expend \$1 million more in energy-related costs than we had budgeted for. This includes gasoline and diesel to operate trucks, equipment and school buses; natural gas and heating oil to heat our buildings and schools; and electricity to keep the lights on in all our buildings. Although we have taken some steps to conserve and be more efficient, we can expect energy costs to have a severe impact on our budgetary planning for FY07.

### **Health Insurance and Retirement Costs**

We continue to experience increases in our health insurance costs that far exceed the rate of inflation. In FY05 (last year) health insurance claims costs rose 18 percent, about 3 percentage points more than we budgeted. We expect claims costs to rise another 14 percent this year. In addition, our pool of retirees continues to grow, potentially adding significant future claims against the Health Insurance Trust.

The Middlesex Retirement System continues to increase its assessment to member towns such as Acton and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District at rates of between 10-15 percent per year. Acton continues to challenge the Retirement system over its mismanagement of funds, but until some resolution is reached, we continue to face ever-increasing assessments.

## The Limitations of Proposition 2½

Proposition 2½ was enacted over 20 years ago as a means to limit property tax increases. While the concept is considered by many to be admirable, when other revenue sources are declining or holding constant and budgets are facing double-digit increases in certain major categories, it is extremely difficult to simply maintain services within the constraint of Proposition 2½. Proposition 2½ only allows an increase of 2½ percent on the base tax levy plus the additional tax revenue new construction contributes (which has been declining). Our ability to fund budget increases has historically come from increases in state aid, new growth, and use of various cash reserves as well as the allowed increase in the tax levy.

Without these alternative sources of revenue on the increase, we face a severe constraint on our budgets. Some relatively simple math shows just how difficult it is to maintain services under these limiting conditions. In FY06 our budgets total approximately \$65 million. Assume that in the coming year, the budget grows by 5 percent or an increase of \$3.25 million. Additional revenue generated under Proposition 2½ is approximately \$1.3 million plus new growth of \$550,000 or a total increase of \$1.85 million. Assuming no increases in other revenue sources, that immediately leads to a budget shortfall of \$1.4 million. Other revenue sources such as state aid and local receipts may make up some of this difference, but it is clear that it will not make up all of the difference. Indeed the current “draft” ALG plan which is reproduced below indicates that we will be fortunate if we can increase budgets by even 4 percent in the coming year.

### Projected Revenues and Budgets

#### FY07 Worksheet

DRAFT - 9/25/05

Highly Volatile Numbers

Subject to Change

	FY	2006	2007	Pct. Change
<b>Revenues:</b>				
Tax Levy:				
Base	\$	46,480	\$ 52,057	
2 1/2%	\$	1,162	\$ 1,301	
New Growth	\$	615	\$ 550	
Debt Excl.	\$	2,811	\$ 3,130	
Operating Override	\$	3,800		
Overlay	\$	(500)	\$ (500)	
Total Tax Levy (excl. current yr. override)	\$	54,368	\$ 56,538	4.0%
Cherry Sheet	\$	4,066	\$ 4,168	2.5%
SBAB - Twin School	\$	1,086	\$ 1,086	0.0%
Excise Taxes	\$	2,835	\$ 3,100	9.3%
Fees	\$	1,000	\$ 1,000	0.0%
Int. Income	\$	200	\$ 250	25.0%
Pension/Pothole/Other	\$	82	\$ -	-100.0%
Regional Revenue	\$	2,532	\$ 2,595	2.5%
Regional E&D Acton's share	\$	314	\$ 200	-36.3%
Free Cash	\$	-	*	
<b>Revenues including Overrides</b>	\$	66,483	\$ 68,937	3.7%
<b>Revenue incl override excluding debt/SBAB</b>	\$	62,586	\$ 64,721	3.4%
<b>Debt Exclusion:</b>				
Debt on APS	\$	498	\$ 505	
Debt on JHS/SHS	\$	1,222	\$ 1,559	
Municipal Debt Incurred	\$	554	\$ 537	
Debt on Police station	\$	537	\$ 529	
<b>Total Debt Exclusions</b>	\$	2,811	\$ 3,130	11%

\* We anticipate a fund balance of \$500,000 in free cash available for appropriation

With health insurance, utilities, and retirement costs increasing at double-digit rates, and very moderate increases for wages in the 2-3 percent range, we continue to face severe budgetary constraints that will make it extremely difficult to maintain services in the coming year, let alone fund any of the significant capital needs that have gone unfunded now for several years. As was mentioned in the State of the Town message last year, unless alternative revenue sources alleviate this structural deficit, we will be placed in the position of requiring operating overrides on a regular basis simply to maintain existing services.

## **Municipal Budgets**

Last year as part of the budget planning process, the ALG and the three major Boards agreed to begin to increase the portion of total revenues that goes to the municipal side to 30.3 percent. We are grateful for this move and hope that it will continue. Nevertheless, Acton remains 10 percentage points below the average of comparable communities (40%) in terms of total revenue devoted to municipal operations. Last year we identified over \$10 million in capital projects that have not been funded over the last 10 years as well as 40 positions within town government needed to process current workloads. These staffing deficiencies remain even as the workload increases. Over the last 10 years the municipal budget including operating and capital has increased at an average annual rate of slightly over 4 percent, well below both the rate of inflation and the allowable increases under Proposition 2½.

Given this statistic and the level of service provided by the town, it is clear that there is no room for further cuts if service levels are to be maintained. We continue to ask ourselves how we can provide this level of service, should certain services be cut back, and how do we attempt to fund much needed capital items as well as needed staff. The municipal operating budget does include over \$1 million of items that most would consider of a capital nature. These items reflect ongoing routine maintenance of our roads and sidewalks, vehicle and building repair and maintenance, but they do not address replacement of existing capital items such as vehicles<sup>2</sup> and other major items.

To help address the capital needs question, a year ago the town and school administrations developed comprehensive capital plans covering the next five years. The Selectmen, Finance Committee and School Committees discussed these plans during a series of 2020 planning meetings last year.<sup>3</sup> These plans identified various capital needs by year of funding, possible alternative funding sources (where available), the cost to bond a project (if eligible), and estimated costs. A copy of the municipal capital plan was included with last year's State of the Town booklet and is included in this book again this year.<sup>4</sup>

Last year, the municipal capital plan identified \$1.2 million in needed capital projects. Another \$500,000 was identified for which possible alternative sources of funding might be available. Such alternative funding sources include Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, grants, and revolving/enterprise accounts such as the NESWC account. With the exception of about \$185,000,<sup>5</sup> none of these projects are funded this year (FY06). As many may recall we had hoped to fund at least \$350,000 with the passage of the \$4.5 million operating override, but the voters chose not to approve this amount.

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of police cruisers which are in the operating budget.

<sup>3</sup> 2020 planning meetings are held during the year as a planning tool in which all members of the three major boards (Fincom, Selectmen, and School Committee) meet in open session to discuss a particular issue or topic. Last year focused on capital planning. This year one meeting has been held to discuss issues related to health insurance with another scheduled for mid-winter.

<sup>4</sup> The schools address their capital plan in their section of the message on this issue.

<sup>5</sup> The bulk of this additional money went to our triennial revaluation in the Assessor's office, which we are legally obligated to do.

A major ongoing item in our capital plan for which there is no alternative funding source is the replacement of old equipment and vehicles in each year of the 5 year plan,<sup>1</sup> yet for the past three years we have been unable to replace this equipment and vehicles. The town has a backlog of over \$1 million in needed vehicle purchases, and each year we go without adds another \$500,000 or so to that list. In addition we have other capital needs, including the design plan for the North Acton Fire Station and reuse of the Central Fire Station, IT improvements, GIS, highway infrastructure and maintenance, and sidewalks to name a few.

We all understand that there is a trade-off between funding capital items and maintaining our operating budgets. It is clear that we cannot fund all of the capital items we need along with maintaining services. The municipal side of town government is somewhat less dependent on people than the schools to perform its work. We need vehicles, heavy equipment and technology to assist our people in doing their jobs. Without well-functioning equipment, valuable person-hours are lost when the equipment is down. Yet at the same time, without sufficient people to perform the job, the best equipment serves no one. Striking that balance is not always easy and the town's administrators must be commended for managing that balance in the best way possible. Nevertheless, the town faces critical needs in terms of both additional people and capital, yet budgetary pressures continue to prevent us from funding these needs.

### **Planning for the Future**

The town's leaders are currently examining this crucial issue as it affects both the municipal and school operations. It is important that we have a comprehensive plan going forward that addresses both operating and capital needs while ensuring that services are provided as cost-effectively as possible. In tight budgetary times as we find ourselves today and likely into the future, we cannot afford surprises such as equipment breakdowns or failing roofs. We must find a way to fund our needs both capital and operating.

To provide more detail on possible options, the rest of this section describes possible ways in which capital items might be funded.

### **Overrides and Exclusions**

One obvious mechanism is to ask the taxpayer to override Proposition 2½ and raise taxes to fund expenditures for capital items. There are in fact three different mechanisms by which Proposition 2½ may be overridden or excluded. Each of these requires not only town meeting action but also a vote at the ballot.

First is what is commonly termed an *operating override* which adds a certain specified amount to the tax levy and this amount becomes a permanent part of the levy in future years. This is what we voted on and passed last year.

A second mechanism that we have used in the past is a *debt exclusion*. A debt exclusion is used to raise additional taxes for the annual debt service costs of projects funded by borrowing.<sup>2</sup> Unlike an operating override, a debt exclusion does not become a permanent increase in the levy, but rather is a temporary

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<sup>1</sup> The capital plan shows outlays of \$465,000 slated for FY06, another \$500,000 in FY07, \$365,000 in FY08, \$473,000 in FY09 and \$627,000 in FY10, all simply to replace vehicles and equipment.

<sup>2</sup> The town or region may also borrow money and repay it within the confines of Proposition 2½, i.e., out of the operating budget. We are currently paying for our MUNIS financial system in this manner

increase in the levy for the life of the debt. We have used debt exclusion to fund major construction projects such as the library, the public safety facility, and the new and renovated schools.

A third type, similar to the second, is a *capital exclusion*. A capital exclusion works in a manner similar to a debt exclusion except that the capital exclusion is funded entirely in the year in which the project is budgeted, typically one year. Thus the levy would be increased by the full amount of the capital outlay, but only for that particular year.

To illustrate the differential impacts that each mechanism has on property taxes, consider the following hypothetical example. Consider an expenditure of \$2 million new capital items. It can be funded either through an operating override, a debt exclusion or a capital exclusion. Further assume the project will be bonded over 10 years. Depending on the mechanism used to finance the project the impact in the first year on our property taxes can be quite different as shown below.

### **Impact on Property Tax of an Average Single Family Home of a \$2 million Capital Project**

#### Funding Mechanism:

1.	Operating override	\$280 <sup>1</sup>
2.	Debt exclusion	\$ 30 <sup>2</sup>
3.	Capital exclusion	\$280 (1 year only)

The major difference between option 1 and option 3 is that in future years there is no tax impact under option 3, whereas under option 1, the \$280 is built into the levy going forward. This of course may be desirable if one expects to have additional capital projects to fund in the future. Alternatively, the debt exclusion (option 2) has a lower impact on property taxes, but would continue for the period of the bonding, in this case 10 years. If other projects were bonded in the future, these amounts would be added to the debt exclusion amount and would increase the property tax impact.

In considering the tradeoffs of each mechanism, not all capital projects may be deemed bondable, i.e., suitable for debt exclusion. The municipal capital plan indicates those projects that are bondable. Also it is important to understand the current and future debt service that the town has outstanding from prior projects. We have benefited in recent years by low interest rates, and the debt service costs on our building projects have ended up considerably lower than we had originally anticipated.<sup>3</sup> The figure below shows that we are at about our peak in terms of debt service, assuming that the junior high and senior high projects go out for permanent financing next year (FY07). Thereafter, as can be seen our debt service (and hence the impact on our property taxes) will begin a gradual decline.

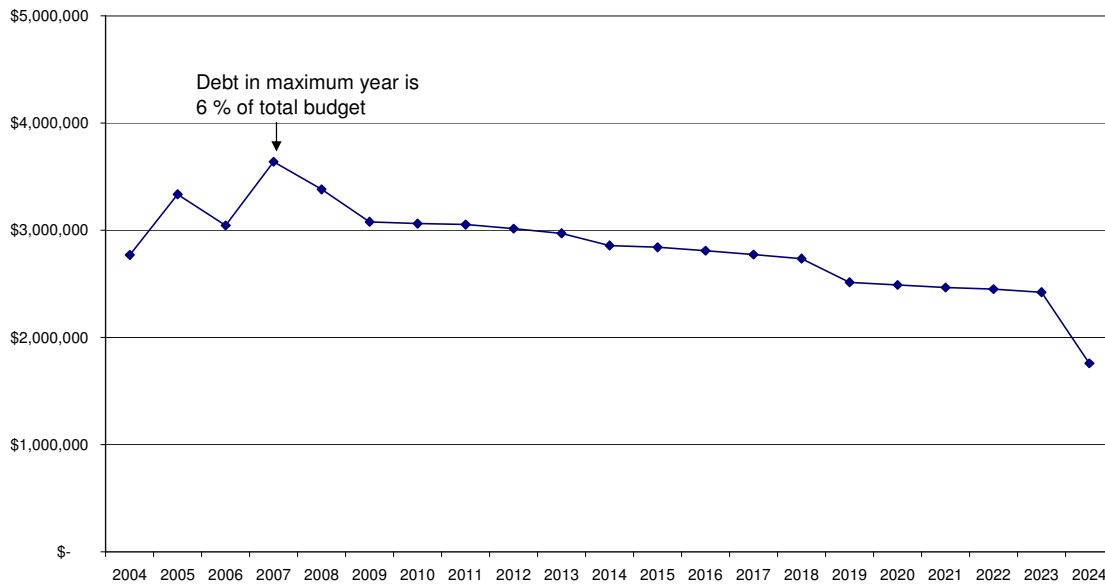
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<sup>1</sup> Assumes an average single family home valued at \$500,000. An increase in \$2 million to the levy would increase the tax rate by  $\$0.56 (2,000,000/3,542,255) * 500 = \$280$ .

<sup>2</sup> Assumes a 2.5% interest rate and first year debt service of \$228,000. This would increase the tax rate by  $\$0.06$  per thousand  $(228,000/3,542,255) = .06 * 500 = \$30$ .

<sup>3</sup> We had originally expected that our net debt service costs would peak at slightly above 10 percent of our total budget, but due to low interest rates, net debt service has been held closer to 5 percent of our budget.

### Total Debt (Excluded and Non-Excluded) - Town of Acton plus Acton's Share of the Regional School District



Includes the estimated impact of SBAB reimbursement on all school projects

### Cash Reserves

In addition to the funding mechanisms listed above, it is also instructive to understand the level of cash reserves we have to determine whether any of these might be used to fund our budgets. The first source of reserves that most people are familiar with is free cash. We expect the state to certify our free cash amount that would be available for appropriation at April town meeting to be in the range of \$500,000. This is an increase over the amount certified last year due to slightly higher revenues and budget turnbacks from the local schools and the municipal budget. At the region, we are informed that they expect to have approximately \$650,000 available in their excess and deficiency (E&D) account which is equivalent to their free cash account.

Each year, we set aside approximately \$500,000 in an account called overlay. This overlay account is used to offset claims made for abatements of property taxes as well as tax title and the like. Some of these claims extend back into the mid 1980s. The current net balance in the overlay account (after consideration of all potential claims) is approximately \$1.4 million. The overlay account is under the control of the Board of Assessors, although the Selectmen have the authority to request the Assessors to determine whether a “surplus” exists. If a surplus is deemed to exist, the money would flow to free cash.

The town and the schools also maintain various enterprise and revolving accounts which relate to the income, expenses and liabilities of providing specific services to the town and schools where the governmental body intends to recover the costs of providing these services through user charges. The operation of the transfer station, recreation programs, community ed, the nursing program, and the CoA van service are examples of services provided to the public for a fee for which an enterprise or revolving account has been established.<sup>1</sup> The selectmen monitor the fund balances in these accounts to ensure they

<sup>1</sup> For those who regularly attend town meeting, you may recall that the appropriation of money for these funds which does not come from taxation is handled as individual items in the warrant, often on the consent agenda.

are adequate. With the possible exception of the NESWC (transfer station) enterprise account, other fund balances appear appropriate to their ongoing level of activity.<sup>1</sup>

With the termination of the NESWC contract this September, one may wish to consider the fund balance related to the transfer station operation. We anticipate a reserve in that account of approximately \$4.3 million by the time we close out the contract. This reserve had been built in part to fund potential liabilities arising from the termination of the NESWC contract along with the potential need to put a final cap on the landfill. Also many have indicated a strong desire to use some of this money to upgrade the recycling facilities at the transfer station and to make the operation more user friendly, especially for seniors and those with disabilities. The state has now indicated that our landfill is definitively capped which may mean that some of this money may be available for other uses. Last spring in considering this issue, the ALG and the major Boards agreed that these funds would not be used for operating budget purposes.

## **Conclusion**

The situation, while difficult, is not without hope. We are not alone in dealing with this problem. Virtually all other cities and towns in the Commonwealth are having to make do with less. A Municipal Financial Task Force, composed of private sector, public sector, and academia experts and leaders, led by John P. Hamill, Chairman of Sovereign Bank New England, recently released a comprehensive report on the state of municipal finances in Massachusetts. The report, “Local Communities At Risk: Revisiting the Fiscal Partnership Between the Commonwealth and Cities and Towns”, provides a comprehensive analysis of municipal revenues, municipal expenditures, and state local aid over a 25-year period and can be accessed electronically at:

[www.mapc.org/Municipal\\_Finance\\_Task\\_Force/Municipal\\_Finance\\_Task\\_Force.html](http://www.mapc.org/Municipal_Finance_Task_Force/Municipal_Finance_Task_Force.html)

This report is recommended as further reading for anyone interested in the complex problems of municipal finance.

We are fortunate to have citizens who understand our dilemma, and who have supported our decisions. We hope that at the upcoming State of the Town meeting we will hear from you and your ideas about how to manage this ongoing fiscal crisis, and how we may be able to find ways to fund critical capital needs while maintaining our level of services.

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<sup>1</sup> Given potential future claims on the health insurance trust from retirees as well as continued escalating costs, consideration must be given to increasing the health insurance trust fund balance.



**Acton Public Schools  
Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools  
2005-2006 Budget and Capital Planning Report**

**Budget Update**

The School Committees are grateful to the citizens of both Acton and Boxborough for passing overrides in both communities. This has allowed the schools to keep the staff that was in place last year. Although class sizes have grown in some cases due to higher enrollment, we did not have to cut staff this year. Although the higher override level for capital upgrades was not approved, we were able to address some of our regular maintenance issues before the end of the year. As the fiscal year ended in June 2005, we were able to return \$75,000 which will go to free cash.

The School Administration and the School Committees have begun work on the budget that will be brought to Town Meeting in April for FY '07 (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 – June 30, 2007). We continue to grapple with the structural deficit caused by the limitations that Proposition 2½ places on revenue growth. Moving from one year to the next with the same staff and service levels requires approximately a 5-6% budgetary increase in today's economy. Health insurance alone requires a 2%-2½% increase to the total budget. Even with nominal salary increases, pension increases, and utility costs, budgets increase 5-6% without adding anything. We have committed to not ask for a general (operating) override this year, so we will need to either find alternative ways to increase revenues, or make additional cuts to existing staff and services. Over the last four years, the two operating overrides have filled the gap for the year that they were implemented. The two years that we did not have overrides resulted in cuts to school staff which have not been restored. Without significant revenue increases this year, we will likely have to make more cuts to school staff and services.

**Question for discussion at the State of the Town Meeting:**

*How would you like elected officials to manage the proposition 2 ½ structural deficit? Would you like to see smaller overrides more often; fewer overrides and more cuts; or do you have ideas for increasing revenues?*

Since April's Town Meeting, the School Committees have been working on several important initiatives related to funding and budgets:

**Employee Contracts Ratified**

The School Committees have signed contracts with all employee bargaining units. The agreement with the Acton Education Association (teachers and nurses) includes the following increases in base salaries in addition to any contractual step increases or increases for longevity:

- 2% July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2006
- 2.75% July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2007
- 2.25% July 1, 2007 – December 31, 2007, with an additional 1%  
January 1, 2008 – June 30, 2008 (budgetary impact 2.75%)

## School Choice

The School Committee voted to re-enact the school choice program at ABRHS. The Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools had as many as 400 choice students from area towns during the enrollment decline of the 1980s. Even though we are in a period of increasing enrollment, we agreed to accept up to 50 students as a way to increase revenues. Most of the choice students have begun at the ninth grade level. ABRHS is experiencing the highest enrollment and the largest class sizes in its history.

<u>Academic year</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>Increase</u>	<u>New teachers</u>
2001-2002	1511		
2002-2003	1600	89	0
2003-2004	1683	83	0
2004-2005	1725	42	0
2005-2006	1849*	124	5
Total 2001-2006	22.4% in four years	338 students	5 teachers funded through choice

\*1849 students this year include 49 choice students. The increase of 124 is made up of 72 Acton and Boxborough Students and 52 choice students from other towns.

Revenue received from choice: \$260,000 (\$5,000 per student state aid)

### Question for discussion at the State of the Town Meeting:

*Is school choice a good idea for Acton and Acton/Boxborough? Should we add more choice students to ABRHS each year for a total of 200 (50 in each of the four grades) increasing the number of students at ABRHS to 2050? Should we include the Junior High and the elementary schools in the choice program?*

## State Advocacy

School Committee members have been in close contact with our state legislators as well as working with area towns and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees on several statewide issues.

- State Aid to Education – Chapter 70
- Legislation related to Health Insurance
- Emergency relief for utilities cost increases

## Chapter 70 Aid

Increases in Chapter 70 aid were a major part of the education reform act of 1992. All communities received more aid through the '90's than they had in prior years through a formula designed for communities in greater need receiving more funding. However, the formula did not always work as designed and discussions for change in the past have not had any results. There is momentum now to take on this task, including a series of public hearings throughout the state. Acton and Acton-Boxborough School Committee members will be attending these meetings and working with our legislators through this very important process.

### Changes in Chapter 70 Aid – Acton Boxborough Regional Schools

	<b>Chapter 70 Aid</b>	<b>\$ Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
FY '01	\$3,124,017	\$383,775	14.01%
FY '02	\$3,543,199	\$419,182	13.42%
FY '03	\$3,543,199	\$ 0	0.00%
FY '04	\$2,834,559	- \$708,640	- 20.00%
FY '05	\$2,896,694	\$ 62,135	2.19%
FY '06	\$3,138,512	\$241,818	8.35%

Chapter 70 Aid to the Regional Schools is still down 11% from 2001-2002, while ABRHS is serving 22% more students in that same time period.

### Changes in Chapter 70 Aid – Acton Public Schools

	<b>Chapter 70 Aid</b>	<b>\$ Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
FY '01	\$2,363,989	\$393,750	19.98%
FY '02	\$2,542,729	\$178,740	7.56%
FY '03	\$2,668,321	\$125,592	4.94%
FY '04	\$2,438,504	- \$229,817	- 8.61%
FY '05	\$2,603,014	\$164,510	6.75%
FY '06	\$2,723,714	\$120,700	4.64%

Acton residents should contact Representatives Atkins and Eldridge and Senator Resor, who serves on the Senate Ways and Means Committee, to advocate for the needs of Acton and other suburban communities.

Pamela.Resor@state.ma.us  
Rep.JamesEldridge@hou.state.ma.us  
Rep.CoryAtkins@hou.state.ma.us

### Health Insurance Legislation

Legislation is currently pending that could remove some of the restrictions placed on communities in determining employee healthcare benefits. Health insurance will continue to be the single biggest budget driver, and any of the proposed changes could help ease the growth in expenses. We have attended meetings with the Lieutenant Governor, and have been in touch with Senator Traviglini's office as well as our own legislators regarding these changes and will be watching the process closely.

## Utilities

The dramatic increase in the cost of utilities is affecting the school budgets in the same ways that it affects all of our citizens. We are looking at locking in a rate this winter that is 52% higher than the rate we locked in last year. We have been working with a utilities consultant, and if natural gas and electric costs remain as high as they are right now it could affect this year's school budgets by as much as \$400,000 above what we budgeted. We have written letters to our legislators asking that they consider an emergency contribution to cities and towns to help alleviate this dramatic increase.

## Question for discussion at the State of the Town Meeting:

*How can you get involved in advocating for Acton's needs at the state level?*

## Capital Updates and Planning

- The ABRHS completion in Spring 2005 signaled the completion of a 10-year plan that transformed our central campus and increased our schools' capacity to serve a population that has grown 28% in that period.
- The Parker Damon Building now houses the Merriam and McCarthy-Towne Schools, with a combined total of over 1000 students.
- The expansion of the R.J. Grey Junior High School now serves about 950 students, and the newly renovated Acton Boxborough Regional High School has increased by 50% to 360,000 square feet and is now serving about 1900 students.
- The former Merriam School building is now an Administration Building that houses the Integrated Preschool; Special Education Administration; Community Education Offices, Preschool, and Extended Day programs; and will soon be home to "Danny's Place," a community funded teen center built in the memory of Danny McCarthy, who was killed in a car accident 2 years ago.
- Significant infrastructure upgrades include electrical and technological capacity to serve the whole campus.
- The most recent update has been the installation of Fieldturf on Leary Field – another grass roots community driven effort that included the single largest fundraising donation to the Acton Boxborough Regional School District, along with funding from the Community Preservation Act and some School Building Project funding.

The School Committee continues to evaluate and plan for the capital needs of the three outlying elementary schools and the Administration Building. Capital needs break into long term projects and short term/ongoing needs.

## Douglas

- Recent Upgrades Completed
  - Heating upgrades 2004 - Replaced univents in all classrooms; new thermostats and components. \$300,000 funded through a five year bond approved at Town Meeting within Proposition 2 ½.
  - Energy efficient lighting upgrade
- Long Term Needs
  - Boiler replacement
  - Roof replacement

- Parking expansion
  - Replacement of septic shared with Gates
  - 3 Modular Classrooms will eventually need to be replaced. Douglas was built as a two section (14 classroom) school, and is being used as a three section (21 classroom) school with three attached modular classrooms.
- Short Term and Ongoing Needs
    - Roof seam repair
    - HVAC improvements
    - Pulverize and re-pave parking and drive
    - Reconstruct basketball courts

## **Conant**

- Recent Upgrades Completed
  - Select thermostat replacement and heating repairs
  - Energy efficient lighting upgrade
- Long Term Needs
  - Complete heating upgrade – including univents, thermostats and boiler replacement
  - Roof replacement
  - Pulverize and re-pave parking and drive
- Short Term Needs
  - Continued heating repairs, fans, miscellaneous HVAC
  - Roof seam repair

## **Gates**

- Recent Upgrades Completed
  - Select thermostat replacement and heating repairs
  - Energy efficient lighting upgrade
  - Paving of part of entrance way
- Long Term Needs
  - Complete heating upgrade – including univents, thermostats and boiler replacement
  - Roof replacement
  - Repave drive, circle, and expand parking
- Short Term Needs
  - Replacement for pressure-treated wood playground equipment
  - Continued heating repairs, fans, miscellaneous HVAC
  - Roof seam repair

## **Administration Building**

- Long Term Needs
  - Replacement of heating system
  - Roof replacement

- Pulverize and re-pave drive and parking
- Short Term Needs
  - ADA lift on stage and other accessibility upgrades
  - Continued heating repairs, fans, miscellaneous HVAC
  - Roof seem repair

### **System-wide**

#### Ongoing Needs

- Replacement plan for facilities equipment – trucks, landscaping and plowing equipment

### **Question for discussion at the State of the Town Meeting:**

*How should we be funding long term and short term capital needs?*

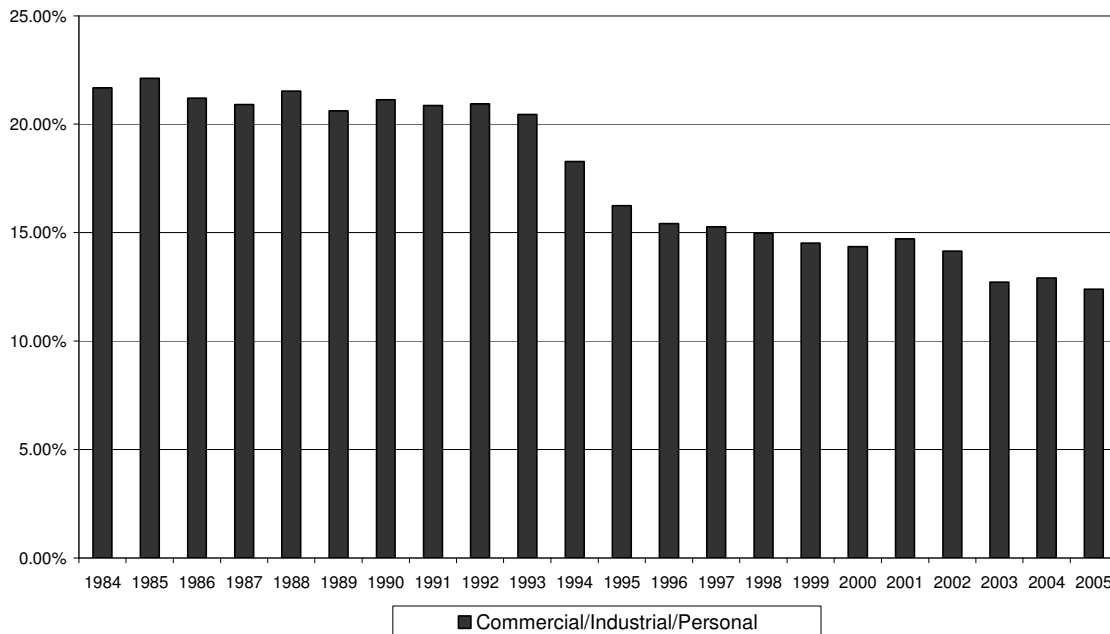
# 3

*What Should be the Role of  
Commercial Development in Acton?*

## Commercial Development – A Fiscal Perspective

In recent years, the split of assessed property value between residential property and commercial/industrial/personal<sup>1</sup> property has increased. The figure below shows the decline in Acton's commercial tax base, as measured by assessed value, as a percentage of the total since 1990. As can be seen in 1990, commercial/industrial property represented about 21 percent of the total assessed property value in town, and in 2005, it now represents only 12.4 percent. This decline occurred most precipitously in the mid 1990s and between 2002 and the present.

**Commercial/Industrial/Personal Property Value as a Percent of  
Acton's Total Property Value  
1984-2005**

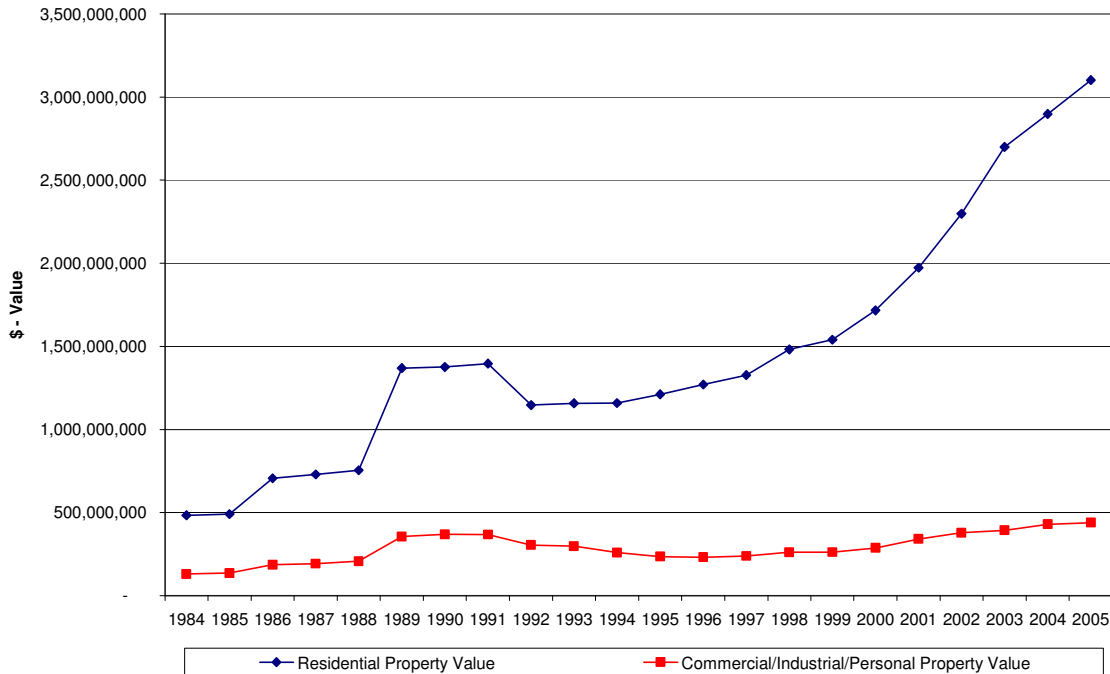


This decline is not attributable to an actual decrease in commercial property values, but rather a much more rapid increase in residential values relative to the increase in commercial property values. This is illustrated in the figure below which indicates that residential property values have risen by over 9 percent per year since 1996, while commercial property values have increased by only about 6 percent per year during the same time period. Thus, the issue is not that commercial property values have not been increasing – they have – however commercial values have been increasing at a considerably slower rate than residential property values. The figure below indicates that this has been most pronounced since about 2000. Since that time, residential property values in Acton have increased by \$1.5 *billion*, whereas commercial property value has increased by only \$151 *million*.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the text we refer to commercial property value to refer to the combination of commercial, industrial and personal property.



### Assessed Property Values by Class: Residential vs. Commercial 1984-2005



Some have argued that moving to a split tax rate, where commercial property is taxed at a higher rate than residential property would help alleviate the tax burden on residential property. This issue is the subject of debate at the Selectmen's annual tax classification hearing when the Selectmen determine the tax rate for the year. At this hearing, the Selectmen have the option to shift the tax burden between different classes of property. For example, several years ago, the Selectmen decided to shift the burden away from residential property to commercial property by 5 percent. Because residential property values are such a high proportion of the total, this shift has a relatively small impact on the residential tax bill and a disproportionately large impact on the commercial tax base. For example, last year when the Selectmen considered whether to keep a uniform tax rate or move to a shift, a 5 percent shift would have reduced the average residential tax bill by \$41 and it would have increased the average commercial/industrial property tax bill by \$577. Stated differently, a 5 percent increase in the tax rate for commercial properties would have reduced the residential tax rate by less than 1 percent.

One common misperception about tax classification is that by shifting more of the tax burden onto commercial property, the total amount of tax collected by the town increases. This is simply not the case. Tax classification and tax shifting does not affect the total tax levy, or the total amount collected by the town in property taxes. A shift, as the word implies, simply shifts the burden slightly away from residential taxpayers onto the commercial property taxpayers in town.

The lesson learned from the relatively small impact that tax shifting has in reducing the residential tax burden may also be applied in understanding the magnitude of commercial development that would be needed to cause an appreciable change in the share of commercial property values as a percentage of total assessed value. There has been discussion in the past as to whether the town should strive to return to an 80/20 split between residential and commercial property value as we had during the 1980s and the early 1990s (see figure above). To illustrate this in some meaningful way, consider the level of commercial development that would be required to simply add 5 percentage points to the commercial value share of the total.

First assume that residential values do not increase at all (an unlikely but simplifying assumption). Under this assumption, it would require an increase in commercial property value of \$215 million or about a 50 percent increase in commercial property value in town to cause a 5 percent increase in the share of commercial value. Again holding residential property values constant, this \$215 million increase in commercial property value would reduce the average single family tax bill by \$395 per year, a decline of about 6 percent. Since we would not expect residential property tax value to remain constant, it would actually take an even greater amount of commercial development to bring about these impacts.

Finally, the Assessors office estimates that to generate the \$215 million in additional commercial property value cited above would require approximately 2.5 million square feet in additional “first class” development. This is equivalent to 35 Brookside Shops, or alternatively 10 “mega” malls (averaging 250,000 sq. ft each). We can all agree that such widespread commercial development is simply not feasible with the land available in town, nor would it be reasonable from many other standpoints. Nevertheless, it is a useful exercise to consider the relationship between commercial development and consequent residential tax impacts to provide insight into the very real questions we hope to address at the meeting of how much commercial development is the right amount, what is the right type of commercial development, and how much will it really mitigate the residential tax bill?

# **Commercial Development in Acton—A Historical Perspective**

## **The Early Days**

In order to understand commercial development in Acton one has to go back to Acton's early history as a largely agricultural community, with some mills and factories located along its waterways. Acton's early industries such as pencil, piano stools, and cigars making, needed its products to be shipped to customers in the larger cities and towns, and the way to do this back then was by rail. Businesses that needed to import goods from Boston or deliver manufactured items and produce to Boston located themselves near the train depots. In Acton there were three depots—one in South Acton across from the Exchange Hall, one in West Acton near the post office, and one in East Acton at the intersection of what is now 2A and Concord Road. Villages developed near these depots, with stores and shipping offices on the main floors, and housing for owners and workers above or nearby. Acton Center served as the "civic" center of town with library, Town Hall, church, and a small General Store. North Acton held a small store, a school, and a church/meetinghouse. It was a system that worked well.

## **The Arrival of the Automobile**

When the automobile came along everything changed. With the popularity of cars and trucks came the expansion of the roadway system. With the building of Routes 2 and 495, the railroads became less important, and highway access became paramount. Kelley's Corner, previously a sleepy intersection was now an exit off a major highway. Beginning at that time, large department and grocery stores that could meet regional needs became the rage, and so Kelley's Corner, rather than developing into a village or downtown, developed into shopping centers with large parking lots. Similar development sprung up along Route 2A.

## **The Arrival of Zoning and Acton's Master Plan**

When zoning came along in the early 1950s, for the first time townspeople were able to have a say in where they wanted their industries, shops, services, and offices, as well as where they wanted their housing, and at what density. Decisions were made and things were built according to those decisions. It wasn't until the late 1980s that Acton as a town decided to take stock and say "what do we want this town to eventually look like in 20, 30, 40, years?" This culminated in Acton's 1990 Master Plan. The vision of the citizens was that they wanted to create a downtown at Kelley's Corner, and have four satellite villages to serve the nearby neighborhoods. Plans were developed for South Acton, West Acton, and Kelley's Corner, and most recently the East Acton Village Plan was completed to encourage village business development. Zoning changes to achieve these plans were passed at Town Meeting. The density for businesses outside the villages was kept lower to discourage expansion there.

## **The Master Plan Update and the Economic Development Committee (EDC)**

In 1998, a process was begun to update the Master Plan. During that process it became apparent that townspeople were willing to accept more commercial development. There had been a large amount of residential growth, and it was felt that an increase in town-friendly businesses such as office uses, light manufacturing such as assembly and other environmentally friendly uses, and a wider variety of shops and restaurants might be beneficial. Efforts were made by the EDC in conjunction with the Planning Board to expand the flexibility of zoning in under-utilized or blighted areas. The completion of sewers in South Acton and Kelley's Corner allowed more restaurants and eliminated the need for large areas for septic systems on commercial lots. Citizens expressed a continued desire of the vision to concentrate mixed-use development in the villages and to develop a Town Center at Kelley's Corner. Efforts to

expand areas that were zoned residential into commercial zones were met with resistance. Focus was kept on improving the simplicity and flexibility of the existing commercial zones. Much public outreach was done and the articles received a highly favorable vote at Town Meeting. Route 2 remained zoned primarily for office use, and the Technology and Powder Mill Districts were created to provide a mixture of office and light industrial zoning. The zoning was proposed with the help of the EDC which had members with property development and real estate experience. Unfortunately, with the recent decline of the technology sector the expectation of Acton's remaining a center for high-tech start-ups was not realized. The zoning is now in place for a variety of commercial, industrial, and retail uses.

### **Acton at the Crossroads**

Acton is at a crossroads—we, your public officials, need to know if we are on the right track. Do you like the village plans? Do you support mixed uses? Do you feel like we have the right balance of commercial uses in town? What types should we encourage, and what types should we discourage? We want to hear what you have to say.

## **Acton Economic Development Committee Perspective**

The Economic Development Committee (EDC) was formed in September 1997 as an advisory committee to the Board of Selectmen. Its mission statement has evolved to the following (5/17/01):

"To enhance the value and desirability of Acton in concert with the Master Plan by

- 1) supporting current commercial and industrial businesses,
- 2) encouraging the absorption of underutilized property, and
- 3) attracting new businesses that meet the long term needs of the Town."

What do we as a Town want? What do we gain with an increase in Commercial Development?

- Property Tax revenue
- Places to obtain goods
- Places to obtain Services
- Places to accomplish work—offices, manufacturing plants
- Jobs

Why is this so difficult?

The idea of "good" business vs. "any" business! What have been the citizens' concerns?

- Traffic
- Noise
- Taking down trees, development of open space

Commercial Economic Development is difficult because although everyone would gladly accept an increase of commercial property tax dollars, they might not be willing to accept the other changes that go along with receiving those same dollars. The Town of Acton has many protections in place: zoning regulations; site plan review; building codes; and public hearings. All of these enable us to weigh both the benefits and the effects of any commercial development.

Where does this leave us? The EDC is guided by the Master Plan. The summary portion of the 1998 Master Plan reads:

### **"Economic Development**

Goal: Promote current and new commercial development within the context of the Master Plan by strengthening the tax base to reduce the tax burden on residential taxpayers.

Objective: Support commercial and industrial growth that will fit in Acton and contribute to the community's quality of life and fiscal stability.

- Encourage commercial and industrial development
- Attract new businesses
- Increase the diversity of commercial enterprise

- Increase Commercial, Industrial and Personal Property (C/I/P) revenues share to 20% within the next 5 years

Objective: Support the concept of village and business districts by encouraging businesses of appropriate scale that will contribute to a mix of activities.”

Following are some examples of what the EDC has worked on and accomplished in the past, and what we plan for the future. The EDC welcomes any comments. We encourage your participation. We expect the town to revise the Master Plan in the near future. What types of businesses would you like to see? Where?

Past Projects of the EDC include:

- Defined the Economic Development Section of the 1998 Master Plan to include provisions for increased commercial development.
- Worked with the Planning Board on a comprehensive revision of Land Uses to simplify business zoning and make it more understandable/manageable.
- Worked with the planning Board to create the “Technology District” and Powder Mill Zoning classifications.
- Conducted an Acton Business Survey.
- Initiated creation of Massachusetts Legislation and promoted Town Meeting votes of support needed to establish the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC).
- Found a way for a business to remain in Acton and increased excise tax revenue.
- Helped to preserve current “good neighbor” businesses.
- Provided a sounding board for local businesses to voice concerns.
- Evaluated the effect on businesses of zoning and bylaw changes.
- Advocated “Mixed Use Development” where possible rather than all residential.
- Created and distributed a brochure designed to attract businesses to Acton (attached).

Future EDC plans:

- Monitor the progress of the plans to continue to install sewers in the town.
- Actively participate in determining reuse of the WR Grace parcel.
- Promote Transfer of Development Rights in East Acton Village.
- Establish creative solutions for car dealership parking zoning.
- Look into the effects that 40B has regarding replacing office building i.e. commercial land use. Educate responsible town boards in that regard.
- Develop metrics by which the EDC will measure its success in accomplishing our mission.
- Advocate for maintaining a uniform tax rate.
- Obtain a list of parcels that are currently zoned commercial and that are empty.
- Develop a list of parcels that are candidates for redevelopment.
- Establish a database to track the number of commercial parcels available for development.
- Establish a database to determine the reasons for change of value in commercial properties due to improvements, loss of use to non commercial use, etc.(Not just market value).
- Review zoning all along Routes 2 and 27.
- EDC to have a representative on Kelley’s Corner Committee when it forms, or any other committee that involves commercial development.
- EDC involvement in the expansion of any sewer district.

- Monitor development potential of the landfill site.
- Attempt to prevent loss of commercially zoned land to other uses.

The current members of the EDC are:

Edmund Starzec, Chairman  
Wayne Friedrichs, Vice Chair  
Ann Chang  
Phillip Janus  
Herman Kabakoff  
William Lawrence  
Chris Papathanasiou  
Rheta Roeber  
Lauren Rosenzweig  
Gary Sullivan



*Historic Acton Center*



*Scupper Jack's at Nagog*

*Nagog  
Technology  
Park*



*NARA  
Park*

*Acton  
Arboretum*



*Mass Ave  
Professional  
Building*

*One  
Acton  
Place*



### **Welcome to Acton, Rich in History and Destined for a Prosperous Future**

Acton Massachusetts is located 25 miles northwest of Boston on scenic Route 2 between the rapidly expanding I-495 technical corridor and the famous Route 128 Technology Highway. Acton is centrally located among the metro cities of Boston, Worcester, and Nashua NH.

### **Economic Development Committee**

The EDC consists of members of town boards, the Chamber of Commerce, and citizens at large. Its members are appointed by the Board of Selectmen to advise them on issues concerning policies and zoning that foster commercial and business growth.

This brochure introduces prospective businesses to the amenities Acton has to offer. We take great pride in our community's history, culture, activism, and academic excellence. If you are considering locating or expanding your business, we invite you to explore Acton -- With a rich past and a prosperous future.

### **Location, Location, Location**

Acton and the surrounding area has the 5th largest per capita income in the U.S. making it attractive for commercial growth. Acton's highly educated workforce has always offered a pool of local talent for area growth companies and industries. Today our residents work with leading-edge companies in hi-tech, financial services, and biotechnology.

Acton is located in the heart of the high-tech corridors -- five miles from I-495 and ten miles from I-95 (128), but protected from the daily rush hour traffic. State and local routes 2, 2A, 27, 62, and 111 conveniently service business and commercial access through town. The MBTA train stop in South Acton provides service for Boston, Cambridge, Waltham, Concord and Fitchburg.

Acton's 20,000+ residents give priority to its schools which are ranked in the top 2% statewide, recreation programs, and libraries. Families and businesses are attracted to a pleasant quality of life with a wide range of amenities, activities, and entertainment including restaurants for every taste, fashion clothing shops, performing arts, a jazz café, and a nearby golf and ski area. West Acton Village, Kelley's Corner, and Route 2A offer convenient services.

### **Economic Development**

With the support of the EDC, the town of Acton has enacted business friendly zoning. EDC members and staff at Town Hall are available to assist businesses with the permit approval process.

Acton's commercial build-out floor area under zoning exceeds three and a half million square feet. The EDC is committed to promoting policy and zoning to meet the ever changing needs of the business community.







*The  
Discovery  
Museums*

*West Acton  
Village*



### **Municipal Services**

Municipal services include police and fire protection, water, public works, libraries, parks, conservation land, active recreation programs, and community continuing education. The North Acton Recreation Area (NARA) with a beach, ball fields and amphitheater is available for corporate functions.

The first phase of a new sewer system has recently come on-line. Water is supplied by the Acton Water District from its own wells in Acton. Continual testing shows it is among the cleanest in the state.

### **Government**

Acton's legislative decisions are made in open Town Meeting by the town's registered voters. A Town Manager is responsible for the town's daily operations. A five member Board of Selectmen sets town policy. Many volunteer committees assist in advising the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen. The EDC plays an important role in advising the Board of Selectmen and Planning Board.

The Economic Development Committee authored the economic development section of the town's Master Plan. Our mission is "To enhance the value and desirability of our community consistent with the Master Plan by 1) supporting current commercial and industrial businesses, 2) encouraging the development of underutilized property, and 3) attracting new businesses that meet the long term needs of the Town."

During the American Revolution, Acton patriots were among the first to lead the charge for self-determination and freedom. Today, this spirit of leadership in Acton is serving to foster innovative business development.

### **For Further Information**

We welcome your interest in doing business in our town, and invite you to contact:

Economic Development Committee  
Acton Town Hall  
472 Main Street  
Acton MA 01720  
Town Planner: (978) 264-9636  
planning@town.acton.ma.us  
www.town.acton.ma.us



*With the support of the Acton:*

Board of Selectmen  
Finance Committee  
Planning Board  
Chamber of Commerce



*Jones Tavern*

## **ACTON Massachusetts**

*A  
Rich  
Past,  
With A  
Prosperous  
Future*



*Town Hall, Acton Center*

**The Acton  
Economic  
Development  
Committee  
Business Alliance**

# **Master Plan Update (1998) - Economic Development**

## **Overview**

Economic development is the process of building a community's capacity for shared and sustainable improvements in the economic well-being of its residents. Such development must be sustainable, must not sacrifice overall quality of life, and must serve the needs of all residents.<sup>1</sup>

The 1991 Master Plan was completed in 1989-1990. At that time, Massachusetts General Law Ch. 41 S. 81-D, Master or Study Plan, did not require an economic development component in a Master Plan. Therefore, issues pertaining to economic development were interwoven throughout the 1991 Master Plan and reflected townspeople's concern about excessive and ill-considered business development. Section 81-D of Chapter 41 of the Massachusetts General Law was amended in March 1991, to require an economic development element "which identifies policies and strategies for the expansion or stabilization of the local economic base and the promotion of employment opportunities."<sup>2</sup>

As a result of the 1991 Master Plan, residential buildout was maintained and non-residential buildout was reduced. Zoning amendments to implement the 1991 Master Plan included reductions in the extent of business and industrial districts, and rezoning of portions of the Route 2A corridor to prevent commercial sprawl. At the same time, the Bylaw amendments sought to reinforce a traditional New England pattern of focal village centers and intervening more rural landscapes. Village scale businesses and mixed uses are seen as important components in the vitality of Acton's villages.

Subsequently, the tax burden has relied more and more heavily on residential property owners which is evidenced in Acton's economic experience during the 1990s. The percent of commercial and industrial tax levy in Acton dropped from 22% to 13%, one of the largest drops of all of the towns and cities along the I-495 technology corridor. In addition, while the total number of land parcels in Acton increased by 6%, the number of parcels zoned for commercial and industrial use decreased by 15%, the second largest decrease of all the communities along the I-495 technology corridor. Acton's 1998 property tax rate is the 5<sup>th</sup> highest in the corridor<sup>3</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> highest in the Commonwealth.

## **Economic Development Goal and Objectives**

**Goal:** Promote current and new commercial development within the context of the Master Plan by strengthening the tax base to reduce the tax burden on residential taxpayers.

**Objective:** Support commercial and industrial growth that will fit in Acton and contribute to the community's quality of life and fiscal stability.

- Encourage commercial and industrial development
- Attract new businesses
- Increase the diversity of commercial enterprise

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<sup>1</sup> "Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Assessing Your Local Economy", Executive Office of Communities and Development, 1994

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Communities and Development, Improved Methods of Municipal Planning, Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, Sections 81A-81J, p. D-1

<sup>3</sup> The I-495 Initiative: Regional Overview (Draft), by Menashi/Steinfeld for Mass. Technology Collaborative, 10/14/98

- Increase Commercial, Industrial and Personal Property (C/I/P) revenues share to 20% within the next 5 years

Objective: Support the concept of village and business districts by encouraging businesses of appropriate scale that will contribute to a mix of activities.

## **Economic Development Issues, Strategies and Action Recommendations**

### **Issue: The Role of Economic Development in Town Life**

In 1998 townspeople feel that progress has been made in safeguarding natural and cultural resources, and that business can play a positive role in community life. The 1998 Master Plan Update reflects a shift to a proactive stance regarding business development so as to take advantage of benefits that can be gained from business activity, while still protecting natural resources and mitigating adverse impacts. This approach will require continued collaborative teamwork between the Town and the business community. Such teamwork may require increased organizational capacity to bridge the traditional gap between the public and the private sectors.

At the same time, while townspeople may be more aware of the potential benefits of business development, the community still places high priority on the protection of natural and cultural resources. Townspeople are also very sensitive to the potential for increased traffic due to business development. There is a need for an on-going effort to engage townspeople in economic development discussions so that they may be informed about and participate in deliberations that weigh the trade-offs involved in balancing the community's desires for economic development and resource preservation.

### **Issue: Working with the Business Community**

The Board of Selectmen created a 10 point set of business-friendly goals to establish a more favorable receptivity of commercial and industrial enterprise. In 1997, the Board of Selectmen created an Economic Development Study Committee. In 1998, it converted the study committee to an Economic Development Advisory Committee, to advise the Selectmen on matters pertaining to Acton's ability to improve its economic well-being.

This Committee (EDC) is comprised of up to 11 residents or business owners representing various interest groups (Selectmen-2, Planning Board-2, Chamber-2, Finance Committee-1, at large-4) and supported by the Assistant Town Planner. The group established its mission to be: *"To enhance the value and desirability of our community by (1) supporting current commercial and industrial businesses, (2) encouraging the absorption of underutilized property, and (3) attracting new businesses that meet the long term needs of the Town."* As a catalyst to its direction, the EDC contracted with the Center for Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts to study and evaluate the Town's demographics, meet with and advise the EDC and create a suggested Economic Development Plan for Acton.

*Strategy ED 1    Actively promote and support commercial and industrial development*

*Strategy ED 2    Encourage the continued growth and development of entrepreneurial high technology companies*

*Strategy ED 3    Amend Zoning Bylaw*

<i>Strategy ED 4</i>	<i>Rezone to increase commercial and industrial development potential</i>
<i>Action ED 1</i>	Encourage commercial development to create a sustainable balance of land uses.
<i>Action ED 2</i>	Give special attention to development of the few remaining commercial/ industrial sites.
<i>Action ED 3</i>	Increase types of land uses allowed.
<i>Action ED 4</i>	Consider elimination of the “high traffic generators” cap in the Zoning Bylaw within the context of the Traffic & Circulation element of the 1998 Master Plan Update.
<i>Action ED 5</i>	Develop implementation plan with incentives that may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of FAR density bonus in Village and Business Districts for business that began as home based business</li> <li>• Identification of Village and Business Districts as prime locations for incubator (start-up) businesses</li> <li>• Encouragement of home based business</li> <li>• Encouragement of incubator (start-up) businesses.</li> </ul>
<i>Action ED 6</i>	Re-write sign bylaw to be less confusing.
<i>Strategy ED 5</i>	<i>Incentives for additional development</i>
<i>Action ED 7</i>	Increase FAR where appropriate.
<i>Action ED 8</i>	Evaluate whether the minimum open space requirement for non-residential zoning districts should be reduced from 50% to 35%.
<i>Action ED 9</i>	Combine the Light Industrial & Light Industrial 1 districts and increase FAR.
<i>Action ED 10</i>	Reduce the minimum lot requirement for the OP-1, OP-2, LI, LI-1 and IP districts.
<i>Action ED 11</i>	Remove the complexity relating to computation of allowed development density in the LB District based on number of parking spaces.
<i>Action ED 12</i>	Revise selected parking requirements.
<i>Action ED 13</i>	Rezone some residential land, in locations well served by infrastructure, to business, commercial and industrial districts.
<i>Action ED 14</i>	Remove Affordable Housing Overlay District from all commercial and industrial zoning districts while working to increase affordable housing options for residential zoned land.
<i>Action ED 15</i>	Prevent conversion/loss of commercial and industrial land to residential development.

*Action ED 16* Consider restructuring the TDR provisions within the Zoning Bylaw to provide sufficient incentives for new development and redevelopment of selected areas.

*Action ED 17* Establish clear design standards for all commercial and industrial districts.

*Strategy ED 6 Infrastructure Improvements*

*Action ED 18* Aggressively pursue state and federal funding of important infrastructure improvements.

*Action ED 19* Construct public sewers.

*Action ED 20* Encourage traffic management, transportation improvements and enhancements (e.g. Route 2 overpass).

*Action ED 21* Continue to advance the work of the Route 2 Corridor Advisory Committee.

*Action ED 22* Continue to advance the work of the Route 2 Corridor Advisory Committee.

*Action ED 23* Work to increase the water withdrawal cap.

*Action ED 24* Work to ensure consistent utility service throughout Acton.

*Action ED 25* Upgrade telecommunication capabilities.

*Strategy ED 7 Improve Permit Process*

*Action ED 26* Simplify Rules & Regulations for all Special Permit/Site Plan processes.

*Action ED 27* Amend Zoning Bylaw to simplify procedures.

*Action ED 28* Re-write the Development Guide to be more informative and include charts to clarify permitting processes.

*Strategy ED 8 Develop a Marketing Plan*

*Action ED 29* Establish an Ambassador Program within Acton to meet with prospective businesses.

*Action ED 30* Evaluate the following:

- Appointment of an Ombudsmen
- Hire of new town staff: Economic Development Director/official
- Establishment of Commercial & Industrial Development Commission or other such entity.

*Action ED 31* Develop and implement educational programs to inform voters of

relationship between commercial and industrial property, quality of life and their tax burden.

*Action ED 32* Consider using a newsletter and/or web site for economic development

*Strategy ED 9* *Database of businesses and available commercial and industrial land*

*Action ED 33* Maintain current and accurate inventory of businesses (update at least annually).

*Action ED 34* Complete database of available vacant, under-utilized commercial and industrial properties and developable land, include features (e.g. rail spur, loading docks).

*Action ED 35* Analyze and react to database.

## **Acton Economic and Industrial Corporation (EDIC)**

Since 1990, the proportion of Acton's local tax revenue coming from businesses has dropped from 23% to 13%. Combined with residential growth, this has placed a great demand on infrastructure and services, and on property taxes. In 1998, Acton developed a Master Plan Update through a public process, which indicated that the townspeople wanted to examine ways to achieve the goal of spurring economic development to help stem the rise in residential property taxes. The Update was ratified in a Town Meeting.

The Economic Development Committee recommended the creation of an Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC), designed to foster commercial development consistent with the goals of the Master Plan Update. This required obtaining permission of Town Meeting to file legislation with the State for a Home Rule Petition to create the EDIC. This permission was granted in April 2000, and in November 2001, the Massachusetts Legislature passed this bill. The bill was accepted by another Town Meeting in April 2003. The EDIC is a semi-public, semi-private developer subject to the same regulations as any private developer, but obviously more sensitive to the particular needs of the Town.

During the summer of 2004 the Selectmen appointed a Board of Directors to lead the EDIC, who have been conducting research since. The EDIC must still write an Economic Development Plan, which must be approved by Town Meeting.

The 2005 State of the Town Meeting will give the townspeople another opportunity to weigh in on economic development. Obviously, there are tradeoffs to be made, but these can be mitigated depending on how the development is managed, and the advantages include help with property taxes and development of local jobs. The EDIC is sensitive to both sets of issues and is seeking guidance from the Town.

You may want to consider these and other questions:

1. How much of an effect on the residential tax rate is "enough" to make a difference?
2. What kind of business development is best?
3. Should we let the private developers and "the market" do their will, or should we try to influence it or manage it?
4. What are some other factors to consider?

Members of the EDIC Board of Directors will attend the SOTM and will be prepared to listen and answer any questions.

Sincerely,

- Josh Chernin, Chairman
- Jon Avery, Vice-Chairman
- Bonnie Wilson, Clerk/Secretary
- Harry Hedison, Treasurer
- Jim Walker
- John Ravis
- (open)

# Appendix A – Board of Selectmen Five-Year Municipal Capital Recommendations

Board of Selectmen  
5 Year Capital Recommendation  
(FY '06 - FY '10)  
Approved June 14, 2004

FY	Cls	Department	Project	Requested Full Cost	Project Status	Recommended Budgetary Impact	To be Bonded	Bonding 1st Year Cost	MGL Chap 44, Section	Maximum Bonding Term in Years	Comments / Funding
2006	B	Engineering	Sidewalks	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 58,150	7 (6)	5	Alternate Funding at \$100,000 - Gift Funds
2006	B	Fire	Protective Clothing	\$ 40,000	Approved	\$ 10,000	no	\$ -	7 (9)	5	\$30,000 In Existing Budget
2006	B	Highway	Sign Machine	\$ 15,000	Not Capital	\$ -	no	\$ 3,489	7 (9)	5	
2006	B	Information Technology	Network Testing/Monitoring Tools	\$ 25,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 5,815	7 (9)	5	Alternate Funding - Cable Fund
2006	B	Municipal Properties	CD Building Fire Alarm	\$ 10,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 1,414	7 (5)	10	
				\$ 340,000		\$ 10,000					
		Council on Aging	Expanded Parking	\$ 25,000	Approved	\$ 25,000	no	\$ 3,535	7 (5)	10	
2006	C	Engineering	Traffic Signal - Hayward & Main	\$ 270,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 38,178	7 (14)	10	
2006	C	Engineering	GPS Equipment	\$ 42,000	Approved	\$ 42,000	no	\$ 9,769	7 (9)	5	Alternate Funding - NESWC
2006	C	Engineering	Scales at Transfer Station	\$ 55,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 12,793	7 (9)	5	Alternate Funding - Bonding & Betterments
2006	C	Health	West Acton Wastewater Preliminary Design	\$ 2,500,000	Approved	\$ -	yes	\$ 581,500	7 (22)	5	Alternate Funding - Grant Only
2006	C	Health	Vehicle Wash	\$ 85,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 8,458	7 (3)	20	Alternate Funding - CPA or grant
2006	C	Health	Pine Hawk Archaeology	\$ 50,000	Approved	\$ -	no				
2006	C	Health	Video Pipe Inspection	\$ 30,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 6,978	7 (9)	5	
2006	C	Highway	Landfill Cap	\$ 2,500,000	Approved	\$ -	yes	\$ 226,250	8 (24)	25	Alternate Funding - NESWC at bond cost of \$226,250
2006	C	Resources	2A/27 Parking lot expansion	\$ 30,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,242	7 (5)	10	
2006	C	Resources	Storage Building/Woodlawn Cemetery	\$ 70,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 6,965	7 (3)	20	Rescind borrowing authorization
2006	C	Resources	School Street Field Development	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 28,029	7 (25)	15	Alternate Funding - CPA
2006	C	Natural Resources	Open Space Acquisition	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 24,875	7 (3)	20	Alternate Funding - CPA
2006	C	Planning	Route 2/Interchange Design	\$ 640,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 90,496	7 (5)	10	
2006	C	Planning	Main Street Crosswalks	\$ 82,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no				
2006	C	Planning	Main Street Sidewalk	\$ 166,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 23,472	7 (6)	10	May be constructed within the annual sidewalk appropriation request
2006	C	Planning	EAV Green	\$ 100,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 11,212	7 (25)	15	Alternate Funding - CPA
2006	C	Planning	Traffic Signal, Great Rd at Concord Rd	\$ 445,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 62,923	7 (14)	10	Alternate Funding - Brookside site plan or TIP
				\$ 7,590,000		\$ 67,000					



Board of Selectmen  
5 Year Capital Recommendation  
(FY '06 - FY '10)  
Approved June 14, 2004

FY	Cls	Department	Project	Requested Full Cost	Project Status	Recommended Budgetary Impact	To be Bonded	Bonding 1st Year Cost	MGL Chap 44, Section	Maximum Bonding Term in Years	Comments / Funding
2006	M	Engineering	Road Drainage, Maintenance - Quarry & Main St.	\$ 80,000	Approved	\$ 80,000	no	\$ 6,787	7 (1)	30	
2006	M	Engineering	Road Drainage, Maintenance & Repair	\$ 50,000	Approved	\$ 50,000	no	\$ 4,242	7 (1)	30	
2006	M	Finance	Triennial Certification	\$ 175,000	Approved	\$ 175,000	no	\$ 175,000		0	
2006	M	Fire	Fire Alarm Panel-Station 2	\$ 21,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 2,969	7 (14)	10	
2006	M	Health	Stormwater	\$ 30,000	Approved	\$ -	no				In Existing Budget
2006	M	Highway	Paving	\$ 400,000	Approved	\$ 200,000	no	\$ 93,040	7 (6)	5	\$200,000 Existing Budget, \$200,000 Additional
2006	M	Highway	Bulldozer Tracks	\$ 25,000	Approved	\$ 25,000	no	\$ 5,815	7 (9A)	5	
2006	M	Information Technology	Desktop & Server Replacement Program	\$ 29,000	Approved	\$ 29,000	no	\$ 6,745	7 (28)	5	
2006	M	Information Technology	MUNIS Software Maintenance	\$ 93,286	Approved	\$ 12,164	no				Existing Budget - \$81,121 plus \$7,500 Munis Portal plus 5% contract increase
2006	M	Information Technology	Copier Lease	\$ 39,900	Approved	\$ 1,900	no				Existing Budget plus \$1,900
2006	M	Municipal Properties	Paint Town Hall	\$ 47,250	Approved	\$ 47,250	no				
2006	M	Natural Resources	NARA Park Improvements	\$ 95,000	Approved	\$ -	no				Alternate Funding - CPA
2006	M	Natural Resources	Pave path around NARA pond	\$ 10,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 2,326	7 (6)	5	Alternate Funding - CPA
2006	M	Planning	EAV Circulation Improvements	\$ 185,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 26,159	7 (5)	10	
				\$ 1,280,436	Approved	\$ 620,314					
2006	V	Health	Vehicle	\$ 17,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 3,954	7 (9)	5	Alternate Funding - Health
2006	V	Highway	Front End Loader	\$ 150,000	Approved	\$ 150,000	no	\$ 34,890	7 (9A)	5	
2006	V	Highway	Two 1-Ton Trucks	\$ 80,000	Approved	\$ 80,000	no	\$ 18,608	7 (9A)	5	
2006	V	Highway	Mechanics Truck	\$ 37,000	Approved	\$ 37,000	no	\$ 8,606	7 (9)	5	
2006	V	Municipal Properties	Replace truck 100	\$ 52,500	Approved	\$ 52,500	no	\$ 12,212	7 (9)	5	
2006	V	Natural Resources	1-Ton Dump Truck	\$ 40,000	Approved	\$ 40,000	no	\$ 9,304	7 (9)	5	
2006	V	Police	Police Cruisers	\$ 105,000	Approved	\$ 105,000	no	\$ 24,423	7 (9)	5	
				\$ 481,500	Approved	\$ 464,500					
			Total 2006	\$ 9,691,936		\$ 1,161,814					

**Board of Selectmen**  
**5 Year Capital Recommendation**  
(FY '06 - FY '10)  
Approved June 14, 2004

FY	Cls	Department	Project	Requested Full Cost	Project Status	Recommended Budgetary Impact	To be Bonded	Bonding 1st Year Cost	MGL Chap 44, Section	Maximum Bonding Term in Years	Comments / Funding
2007	B	Engineering	Sidewalks	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 58,150	7 (6)	5	Alternate Funding at \$100,000 - Gift Funds
2007	B	Highway	Berm Machine	\$ 12,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 2,791	7 (9)	5	
2007	B	Highway	Plate Compactor	\$ 12,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 2,791	7 (9)	5	
2007	B	Highway	Sidewalk Roller	\$ 13,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 3,024	7 (9)	5	
2007	B	Municipal	Cemetery Burglar alarm	\$ 6,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no				
				\$ 293,000							
2007	C	Municipal	DPW Building renovations	\$ 131,250	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 13,059	7 (3A)	20	
2007	C	Municipal	North Action Fire Station Design & Center Station Reuse Plan	\$ 400,000	Approved	\$ 93,040	yes	\$ 93,040	7 (22)	5	Moved from 2006
2007	C	Resources	Gardner Field Project	\$ 190,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 21,302	7 (25)	15	Alternate Funding - CPA
2007	C	Resources	Bruce Freeman Rail Trail	\$ 450,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 50,453	7 (25)	15	Alternate Funding - CPA
2007	C	Resources	NARA Park Picnic Pavilion	\$ 150,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 16,818	7 (25)	15	Alternate Funding - CPA
2007	C	Resources	Morrison Property Phase 1 Development	\$ 150,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 16,818	7 (25)	15	Alternate Funding - CPA
2007	C	Resources	Heath Hen Projects	\$ 8,000	Approved	\$ -	no				
2007	C	Resources	Arboretum Development	\$ 25,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 5,815	7 (6)	5	Alternate Funding - CPA
2007	C	Resources	Open Space Acquisition	\$ 250,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 24,875	7 (3)	20	Alternate Funding - CPA
2007	C	Planning	EAV	\$ 335,000	Approved	\$ 93,040	no	\$ 47,369	7 (5)	10	
				\$ 2,089,250							
2007	M	Engineering	Road Drainage, Maintenance & Repair	\$ 50,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,242	7 (1)	30	In Existing Budget
2007	M	Health	Stormwater	\$ 30,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 101,646	7 (6)	5	In Existing Budget
2007	M	Highway	Paving	\$ 437,000	Approved	\$ 37,000	no				Partially in Existing Budget
2007	M	Information Technology	Server Storage Improvements	\$ 25,000	Approved	\$ 25,000	no	\$ 3,535	7 (28)	10	

Board of Selectmen  
5 Year Capital Recommendation  
(FY '06 - FY '10)  
Approved June 14, 2004

FY	Cls	Department	Project	Requested Full Cost	Project Status	Recommended Budgetary Impact	To be Bonded	Bonding 1st Year Cost	MGL Chap 44, Section	Maximum Bonding Term in Years	Comments / Funding
2007	M	Information Technology	Desktop & Server Replacement Program	\$ 30,050	Approved	\$ 50	no	\$ 4,249	7 (28)	10	Partially in Existing Budget - \$93,052 plus 5% increase
2007	M	Information Technology	MUNIS Software Maintenance	\$ 97,950	Approved	\$ 4,652	no				Partially in Existing Budget - \$39,900 plus 5% increase
2007	M	Information Technology	Copier Lease	\$ 41,895	Approved	\$ 1,995	no				
2007	M	Municipal Properties	Pave Town Hall parking lot	\$ 25,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 5,815	7 (6)	5	
2007	M	Municipal Properties	Windsor Building heat	\$ 15,000	Approved	\$ 15,000	no	\$ 2,121	7 (3B)	10	
2007	M	Municipal Properties	Re-roof Windsor Building	\$ 12,000	Not Approved	\$ 12,000	no	\$ 1,194	7 (3A)	20	
2007	M	Natural Resources	Playground replacement project	\$ 100,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 11,212	7 (25)	15	
2007	M	Natural Resources	Elm Street ball field light replacement	\$ 70,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 9,898	7 (14)	10	
				\$ 933,895	Approved	\$ 95,697					
2007	V	Building	Replace Existing Vehicle	\$ 17,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 3,954	7 (9)	5	Alternate Funding - Building
2007	V	Fire	Brush Fire Truck	\$ 75,000	Approved	\$ 75,000	no	\$ 17,445	7 (9A)	5	
2007	V	Fire	Car 31	\$ 35,000	Approved	\$ 35,000	no	\$ 8,141	7 (9)	5	
2007	V	Fire	Ambulance	\$ 190,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 44,194	7 (9A)	5	
2007	V	Health	Vehicle	\$ 17,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 3,954	7 (9)	5	Alternate Funding - Health
2007	V	Highway	Roadway Snow blower	\$ 125,000	Approved	\$ 125,000	no	\$ 29,075	7 (9A)	5	
2007	V	Highway	Dump Trailer	\$ 45,000	Approved	\$ 45,000	no	\$ 10,467	7 (9)	5	
2007	V	Highway	DPW Inspector's Vehicle	\$ 17,000	Approved	\$ 17,000	no	\$ 3,954	7 (9)	5	
2007	V	Municipal Properties	Replace Truck 108	\$ 29,925	Approved	\$ 29,925	no	\$ 6,961	7 (9)	5	
2007	V	Natural Resources	Tractor w/tow behind mowers	\$ 40,202	Approved	\$ 40,202	no	\$ 9,351	7 (9A)	5	
2007	V	Natural Resources	2 Turf Tiger riding mowers	\$ 22,650	Approved	\$ 22,650	no	\$ 5,268	7 (9)	5	
2007	V	Police	Police Cruisers	\$ 110,250	Approved	\$ 110,250	no	\$ 25,644	7 (9)	5	
				\$ 724,027		\$ 500,027					
			Total 2007	\$ 4,040,172		\$ 688,764					

Board of Selectmen  
5 Year Capital Recommendation  
(FY '06 - FY '10)  
Approved June 14, 2004

FY	Cls	Department	Project	Requested Full Cost	Project Status	Recommended Budgetary Impact	To be Bonded	Bonding 1st Year Cost	MGL Chap 44, Section	Maximum Bonding Term in Years	Comments / Funding
2008	B	Engineering	Sidewalks	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ 100,000	no	\$ 58,150	7 (6)	5	Level Funded but gifts are fully spent
2008	B	Highway	Air Compressor	\$ 18,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,187	7 (9)	5	
				\$ 268,000		\$ 100,000					
			North Acton Fire Station Construction & Construction for Reuse of Acton Center Fire Radio System Upgrade	\$ 4,000,000	Approved	\$ 398,000	yes	\$ 398,000	7 (3)	20	Bonded moved from 2006
2008	C	Municipal Properties		\$ 110,000	Approved	\$ 110,000	no	\$ 15,554	7 (14)	10	Moved from 2007
2008	C	Fire	SCBA Units & Air Compressor	\$ 142,000	Approved	\$ 142,000	no	\$ 33,029	7 (9)	5	Subject to further review
2008	C	Health	West Acton Wastewater Construction	\$ 20,000,000	Approved	\$ -	yes	\$ 1,696,667	8 (15)	30	Completes W.A. project. Alternate Funding-- Bonding and Betterments
2008	C	Health	Water Lab	\$ 25,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 5,815	7 (9)	5	
2008	C	Information Technology	IP Telephony	\$ 100,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 23,260	7 (9)	5	
2008	C	Information Technology	On-Line Billing and Collection	\$ 30,000	Approved	\$ 30,000	no	\$ 6,978	7 (29)	5	
2008	C	Information Technology	Geographic Information System	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ 35,350	yes	\$ 35,350	7 (18)	10	Moved from 2007, Bonded
2008	C	Information Technology	Intrusion Detection/Decoy System	\$ 35,000	Approved	\$ 35,000	no	\$ 4,949	7 (28)	10	Moved from 2007
2008	C	Municipal Properties	DPW Storage Shed	\$ 210,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 20,895	7 (3A)	20	
2008	C	Municipal Properties	17 Woodbury Lane renovations	\$ 400,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 39,800	7 (3A)	20	Alternate Funding - CPA
2008	C	Natural Resources	NARA parking lot expansion	\$ 60,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 8,484	7 (5)	10	
2008	C	Natural Resources	NARA irrigation	\$ 40,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 9,304	7 (9)	5	
2008	C	Natural Resources	NARA Park Sprayground	\$ 120,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 13,454	7 (25)	15	
2008	C	Natural Resources	Camp Acton - Parking & Driveway Improvement	\$ 5,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 1,163	7 (6)	5	
2008	C	Natural Resources	Arboretum Development	\$ 30,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 6,978	7 (9)	5	

Board of Selectmen  
5 Year Capital Recommendation  
(FY '06 - FY '10)  
Approved June 14, 2004

FY	Cls	Department	Project	Requested Full Cost	Project Status	Recommended Budgetary Impact	To be Bonded	Bonding 1st Year Cost	MGL Chap 44, Section	Maximum Bonding Term in Years	Comments / Funding
2008	C	Natural Resources	Heath Hen Project	\$ 20,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 2,242	7 (25)	15	
2008	C	Natural Resources	Open Space Acquisition	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 24,875	7 (3)	20	Alternate Funding - CPA
2008	C	Planning	East Acton Village Gateways	\$ 55,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 7,777	7 (5)	10	
2008	C	Planning	Action Center Historic District Gateways	\$ 40,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 5,656	7 (5)	10	
				\$ 25,922,000		\$ 750,350					
2008	M	Engineering	Road Drainage, Maintenance & Repair	\$ 50,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,242	7 (1)	30	In Existing budget
2008	M	Health	Stormwater	\$ 30,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 110,950	7 (6)	5	In Existing budget
2008	M	Highway	Paving	\$ 477,000	Approved	\$ 40,000	no				Partially In Existing budget
2008	M	Information Technology	Desktop & Server Replacement Program	\$ 31,153	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,405	7 (28)	10	In Existing budget
2008	M	Information Technology	MUNIS Software Maintenance	\$ 102,848	Approved	\$ 4,885	no				Partially In Existing Budget - \$97,704 plus 5% increase
2008	M	Information Technology	Copier Lease	\$ 43,990	Approved	\$ 2,094	no				Partially In Existing Budget - \$41,895 plus 5% increase
2008	M	Municipal Properties	Paint various buildings	\$ 43,670	Approved	\$ 43,670	no				
2008	M	Municipal Properties	Cemetery Buildings roofs	\$ 15,750	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 1,567	7 (3A)	20	Alternate Funding - Cemetery
2008	M	Natural Resources	Arboretum Parking Lot	\$ 30,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,242	7 (5)	10	
2008	M	Natural Resources	Leaf Vac	\$ 10,150	Approved	\$ 10,150	no	\$ 2,361	7 (9)	5	Moved from 2006
2008	M	Planning	Master Plan	\$ 180,000	Approved	\$ 180,000	no				
				\$ 834,561		\$ 280,799					
2008	V	Fire	Rescue Truck	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 58,150	7 (9)	5	Alternate Funding - Ambulance Fund
2008	V	Highway	Dump Truck	\$ 75,000	Approved	\$ 75,000	no	\$ 17,445	7 (9)	5	
2008	V	Highway	Sidewalk Tractor	\$ 80,000	Approved	\$ 80,000	no	\$ 18,608	7 (9)	5	
2006	V	Municipal Properties	Replace brush chipper	\$ 27,300	Approved	\$ 27,300	no	\$ 6,350	7 (9)	5	Moved from 2006
2008	V	Municipal Properties	Replace Truck 109	\$ 41,000	Approved	\$ 41,000	no	\$ 9,537	7 (9)	5	
2008	V	Natural Resources	3 Walk-Behind Mowers	\$ 15,424	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 3,588	7 (9)	5	Alternate Funding - Recreation
2008	V	Police	Police Cruisers	\$ 140,763	Approved	\$ 140,763	no	\$ 32,741	7 (9)	5	
				\$ 629,487		\$ 364,063					
			Total 2008	\$ 27,654,048		\$ 1,495,212					

Board of Selectmen  
5 Year Capital Recommendation  
(FY '06 - FY '10)  
Approved June 14, 2004

FY	Cls	Department	Project	Requested Full Cost	Project Status	Recommended Budgetary Impact	To be Bonded	Bonding 1st Year Cost	MGL Chap 44, Section	Maximum Bonding Term in Years	Comments / Funding
2009	B	Engineering	Sidewalks	\$ 250,000 \$ 250,000	Approved	\$ 50,000 \$ 50,000	no	\$ 58,150	7 (6)	5	Funded at \$150,000. Partially Funded in Existing Budget
2009	C	Health	East Acton Wastewater Construction	\$ 20,000,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 1,696,667	8 (15)	30	Design moved to 2011. Finish West Acton Construction First
2009	C	Health	Monitoring Wells	\$ 25,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 3,535	8 (3A)	10	
2009	C	Highway	Replace Sand Shed	\$ 225,000	Approved	\$ 22,388	yes	\$ 22,388	7 (3A)	20	
2009	C	Municipal Properties	Fire Stations renovations plans	\$ 315,000	Approved	\$ 73,269	yes	\$ 73,269	7 (22)	5	Moved from 2008
2009	C	Natural Resources	NARA Field Lighting	\$ 150,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 21,210	7 (14)	10	
2009	C	Natural Resources	Town Forest/Interior NARA lighting	\$ 60,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 8,484	7 (14)	10	
2009	C	Natural Resources	Dek Hockey Rink	\$ 200,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 22,423	7 (25)	15	
2009	C	Natural Resources	Quarry Road Tennis Courts	\$ 150,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 16,818	7 (23)	15	
2009	C	Natural Resources	Aboretum Development	\$ 800,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 79,600	7 (3)	20	
2009	C	Natural Resources	Open Space Acquisition	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 24,875	7 (3)	20	Alternate Funding - CPA
2009	C	Planning	Village Centers - Market Study Bkewey Kelley's Corner to West Acton	\$ 67,000 \$ 1,000,000 \$ 23,242,000	Not Approved Not Approved Approved	\$ - \$ - \$ 95,657	no no no	\$ 141,400	7 (5)	10	
2009	M	Engineering	Road Drainage, Maintenance & Repair	\$ 50,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,242	7 (1)	30	In Existing Budget
2009	M	Highway	Paving	\$ 518,000	Approved	\$ 41,000	no	\$ 120,487	7 (6)	5	Partially in Existing Budget
2009	M	Information Technology	Desktop & Server Replacement Program	\$ 32,310	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,569	7 (28)	10	In Existing Budget
2009	M	Information Technology	MUNIS Software Maintenance	\$ 107,990	Approved	\$ 5,129	no				Partially in Existing Budget - \$102,589 plus 5% increase
2009	M	Information Technology	Copier Lease	\$ 46,189	Approved	\$ 2,199	no				Partially in Existing Budget - \$43,989 plus 5% increase
2009	M	Municipal Properties	Town Hall Roof Replacement	\$ 300,000 \$ 1,054,489	Approved	\$ - \$ 48,328	no	\$ 29,850	7 (3A)	20	Alternate Funding - CPA

Board of Selectmen  
5 Year Capital Recommendation  
(FY '06 - FY '10)  
Approved June 14, 2004

FY	Cls	Department	Project	Requested Full Cost	Project Status	Recommended Budgetary Impact	To be Bonded	Bonding 1st Year Cost	MGL Chap 44, Section	Maximum Bonding Term in Years	Comments / Funding
2009	V	Highway	Low Bed Trailer	\$ 55,000	Approved	\$ 55,000	no	\$ 12,793	7 (9)	5	Moved from 2008
2009	V	Highway	Replace Backhoe	\$ 150,000	Approved	\$ 150,000	no	\$ 34,890	7 (9A)	5	
2009	V	Highway	Dump Truck	\$ 78,000	Approved	\$ 78,000	no	\$ 18,143	7 (9)	5	
2009	V	Municipal Properties	Replace truck 103	\$ 43,000	Approved	\$ 43,000	no	\$ 10,002	7 (9)	5	
2009	V	Natural Resources	New Backhoe	\$ 75,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 17,445	7 (9A)	5	Alternate Funding - Cemetery
2009	V	Police	Police Cruisers	\$ 146,551	Approved	\$ 146,551	no	\$ 34,088	7 (9)	5	
				\$ 547,551		\$ 472,551					
			Total 2009	\$ 25,094,040		\$ 666,536					

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2010	B	Engineering	Sidewalks	\$ 250,000 \$ 250,000	Approved	\$ - -	no	\$ 58,150	7 (6)	5	In Existing Budget
		Municipal Properties	Town Common underground utilities	\$ 767,500	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 111,353	7 (14)	10	
2010	C	Municipal Properties	Fire Stations Renovations	\$ 3,000,000	Approved	\$ 298,500	yes	\$ 298,500	7 (3A)	20	Moved from 2009
2010	C	Natural Resources	Storage Area at NARA Amphitheater	\$ 200,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 19,900	7 (3)	20	
2010	C	Natural Resources	3-hole instruction golf course	\$ 250,000	Not Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 24,875	8 (16)	20	
2010	C	Natural Resources	Camp Acton - Composting Toilet	\$ 30,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 6,978	7 (9)	5	
2010	C	Natural Resources	Open Space Acquisition	\$ 250,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 24,875	7 (3)	20	Alternate - CPA
2010	C	Planning	Realignment Brook St./Main St. East Acton Village On-Street Parking	\$ 42,000 \$ 750,000 \$ 5,309,500	Approved Not Approved	\$ 42,000 - \$ 340,500	no no no	\$ 5,939 \$ 106,050	7 (5) 7 (5)	10	Moved from 2008
			Road Drainage, Maintenance & Repair	\$ 50,000	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,242	7 (1)	30	In Existing Budget
2010	M	Highway	Paving	\$ 562,000	Approved	\$ 44,000	no	\$ 130,721	7 (6)	5	
2010	M	Information Technology	Desktop & Server Replacement Program	\$ 33,525	Approved	\$ -	no	\$ 4,740	7 (28)	10	In Existing Budget
2010	M	Information Technology	MUNIS Software Maintenance	\$ 113,390	Approved	\$ 5,385	no				Partially in Existing Budget - \$107,718 plus 5% increase
2010	M	Information Technology	Copier Lease	\$ 48,498	Approved	\$ 2,309	no				Partially in Existing Budget - \$46,188 plus 5% increase
2010	M	Town Clerk	Replace Voting Machines	\$ 40,000 \$ 847,413	Approved	\$ 40,000 \$ 91,694	no	\$ 9,304	7 (9)	5	



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2011	C	Health	East Acton Wastewater Preliminary Design	\$ 2,500,000 \$ 2,500,000	Approved	\$ 581,500 \$ 581,500	yes	\$ 581,500	7 (22)	5	Moved from 2007. Other 2011 items have not been included as of this printing.
			Total 2011	\$ 2,500,000		\$ 581,500					
			Grand Total	\$ 75,931,737		\$ 5,553,648					

## **Appendix B – Planning for Acton’s Future Wastewater Needs**

As part of the acceptance of the Middle Fort Pond Brook Sewer Project by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Town agreed to undertake a Comprehensive Water Resources Management Planning effort to determine the wastewater disposal needs and analysis for the entire Town, along with the integrated planning necessary to protect Acton’s vital liquid resources. At the 2002 Annual Town Meeting, \$500,000 was appropriated for the study. A call went out for residents to volunteer for the Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC). This committee, with a cross-section of interests, has been meeting at least four times a year since then.

The CAC and Town Staff chose Woodard & Curran (W&C) to work as consultants on the planning project. Their first task was to have the scope of the study approved by the DEP. The approved scope initially included five phases, which, thanks to the efforts of the CAC and the project team, have been consolidated into three.

Phase I of the study included the mapping of the Town noting areas of wastewater disposal need. Need is a technical term used to describe lots that “need” a solution other than their current onsite wastewater (septic) system. In many cases this is an area where the soils and drainage are poor, wetlands are close, and there are health concerns about the level of groundwater pollution caused by a conventional septic system. All the needs areas were also inspected after discussions with the CAC members. The needs map has gone through several iterations with suggested changes by the CAC.

A total of 15 needs areas were identified covering an area equal to approximately two-thirds of the town. The CAC then prioritized the needs areas, placing those of greatest need in rank order. The results of these analyses were presented at a public meeting in November of 2004, and published in the document:” Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan, June 14, 2004”, which is available in the Health Department office, the Acton Memorial Library or from the Health Department page on the Town of Acton website.

The project team, consisting of Acton Health Department staff: Director Doug Halley and Environmental Health Specialist Brent Reagor, and Woodard & Curran consultants developed a list of four possible solutions for the needs areas. The solutions are:

1. Connecting to the existing sewer system;
2. Construction of a new sewer collection system and wastewater treatment plant in another section of Town;
3. Clustering of homes and neighborhoods into smaller “satellite” systems with smaller scale wastewater treatment facilities; and
4. The establishment of wastewater management districts – these districts would be distinct areas of the community where additional levels of regulatory management would be placed on onsite wastewater systems currently installed.

During the summer of 2005, the CAC has worked with the project team to rank, in order of preference (1-4), the solutions for each of the 15 needs areas identified. This is the first step in Phase II of the project, which will conclude with a report detailing the preferred solutions for the 15 needs areas, and a basic analysis of the obstacles that must be overcome to implement each of the solutions. It is hoped that this phase will finish with a public meeting on or about December 8, 2005 present the results. More specifics of this public meeting will be announced later in the fall.

If you have any questions regarding the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan or the Citizen's Advisory Committee, please contact Doug Halley or Brent Reagor at the Acton Health Department at (978) 264-9634.

Important Dates Regarding the CWRMP Process:

CAC Meeting with the Board of Selectmen:	November 1 <sup>st</sup> , 8:15pm
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Public Meeting to Present the Phase II Report:	December 8 <sup>th</sup> , 7:00pm at the Senior Center
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